

IN THE NANTAHALAS

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— MRS. F. L. TOWNSEND —



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IN THE
NANTAHALAS

A NOVEL

BY
MRS. F. L. TOWNSEND



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By
MRS. F. L. TOWNSEND

To My Husband,

WHOSE IDEAL OF LIFE HAS HELPED ME
TO KEEP A CLEAR VISION,

I Lovingly Dedicate This Book.

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PREFACE.

A decade or more ago there began to appear in the Church press fugitive articles which covered such a wide range of practical and living subjects and which were marked by such cultured wisdom and literary finish as to move many an edified reader to ask the question, "Who is she?" This natural and, therefore, pardonable interest suffered no decline when the writer was found to be a Methodist preacher's wife, who had caught a view of a world much bigger than the parsonage and the parish, and who had demonstrated her ability to minister as a true wife and loving mother in a little parsonage home and at the same time to make the great outside world better by her thought-product.

The reading public is to be congratulated on the fact that Mrs. Townsend essayed the ambitious task of writing a book, and that the book is "In the Nantahalas."

It is a story of heart-touching interest in which a labor of love and justice is apparent. It forms the motif of the book. The mountaineers of North Carolina are presented in their true character, and not as the ignorant, shiftless, hopeless people who live in sensational fiction and in the newspaper articles of the uninformed missionary zealot.

Judge Jeter C. Pritchard, who as United States Senator reflected honor on his State, and who is now rendering distinguished service as Judge of the United States Circuit Court, is proud of the fact that he is one of these "mountain whites." Judge Pritchard says: "I have recently read with much pleasure Mrs. F. L. Townsend's book entitled 'In the Nantahalas.' In this book Mrs. Townsend in portraying the character

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of the typical mountaineer comes nearer doing our people justice than any one who has heretofore dealt with the subject. . . . We are making wonderful progress along moral and intellectual lines, and this book will prove to be valuable in that it places people in a proper light before the country at large."

As a work of fiction "In the Nantahalas" is a strong, artistic production in which knowledge of human nature, imaginative reach, and descriptive power are important elements. When the last chapter has been read, the reader of the right kind feels that he has been breathing a pure atmosphere and has been mingling with characters who in their weakness or strength can stir the noblest impulses of the soul.

Bishop James Atkins, who has lived nearly all his useful and honored life among Mrs. Townsend's mountaineers, says: "The story is one of love, and is all the better for that. It is not complicated, but simple, deep, beautiful, ennobling." These words contain a just tribute to the book.

In introducing Mrs. Townsend's book to the public, I have the feeling which possesses one when he knows that he is introducing something good. I know that "In the Nantahalas" is a real contribution to the welfare fund of humanity, and I present it as such.

THOMAS N. IVEY.

August 22, 1911.

In the Nantahalas

CHAPTER I.

IN THE NANTAHALAS.

The mountains, in their calm majesty, lifted their heads against the glow of a sunset sky. The clear call of a bird struck across the still air. Red and gold battled for preëminence in the heavens while the valley and the green hillsides bathed themselves in the mingled flood of radiance.

A young girl stood with her face turned toward the mountains of the gleaming West. Her arms were bare to the elbows, and showed the strength of healthful usage. In spite of her simple calico dress, made with no reference to the latest fashion, her figure had grace and charm. The face held its own tale of mingled sadness and sweetness. The austerity of these mighty hills sometimes touches the women with an oppressive restraint. The glad outflowing of buoyant spirits is alien to the mountain girl who has kept within her fastnesses.

She had started home from the pasture, and after closing the gap turned to look out on the scene which was old and yet ever new in its manifold beauty.

A sound of horse's hoofbeats along the trail at the

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edge of the wood caught her attention. She turned, and the light of a quick smile brightened her face.

A bit of a pony, old and shaggy and blind in one eye, was coming up the hillside. Seated on his back, in an attitude of courageous uneasiness, was a little woman no longer young but carrying with her the everlasting spirit of youth.

"Wait for us, Linda. I have started to your house."

"I am glad," answered the girl.

The pony stopped with such suddenness that his rider saved herself from pitching off head foremost only by clutching fiercely at his mane. The lady dismounted and started up the path, walking by the girl's side and leading her horse. "I think Bob is trying his best to make me believe in the doctrine I fought during twelve long years."

"What doctrine, Miss Wells?"

"The transmigration of souls."

"Yes'm?" There was interrogation in Linda's voice.

"The Buddhists think even a woman may have the good luck to be born a man sometime if she keeps doing her best; if not, she's likely to be a cat or some other animal. Bob behaves as if he might be the incarnate spirit of some contrary woman. He's sure to go fast when I want him to go slowly and carefully. Every time I speak to anybody he thinks we're in for a long conversation and stops so suddenly that he almost jerks my head off. Then he never forgets to try to follow the path he once trod, no matter how anxious I am to hurry on. I spent a night sometime ago in Corbin's Cove, and it's a pitched battle now every time I undertake to pass the road that leads to it. O, he is a provoking little fellow, but I love him!"

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The girl had listened attentively. "You said they believed over there that a woman might be a man if she'd do her best. Is it that way ever'where—the women having the hard time an' feeling that they are not as good as the men?"

Her voice had a tone of bitterness that caused Miss Wells to look intently at her. She spoke seriously in answer to the girl's question. "That is often the case among primitive peoples, Linda; but I think we have the highest trust. Except where their condition is degraded women have the finest interests of the race in their hands—the spiritual welfare of the men and women who make a country's future."

"O, Miss Wells, sometimes when I hear you talk, I feel like there's something to live for; but when I go back to Aunt Sarah's and see how things are and what little good I can do, I feel like giving up. We are so poor, an' there's enough to do the work without me, an' I cain't help feeling myself in the way."

"Dear, don't do that. We all have our moments of discouragement when we feel sure our work is worth nothing to others. But your aunt has talked to me of your helpfulness. You are more thoughtful for her, I'm sure, than her own daughters are; and your influence in the home is for good—always."

"Maybe I do help her right smart, but I believe the girls would think more about taking care of her if I wasn't there. You see, they're used to my going ahead an' doing for her."

"How old are you, Linda, if you don't mind my asking?"

"Eighteen next month."

"Have you ever thought of getting ready to do work in the outside world?"

"What could I do, Miss Wells? I cain't do anything

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well. I can cook a little, but how could I learn when Aunt Sarah don't know much an' we don't have much to learn with?"

Miss Wells looked at her sympathetically. She knew that her own help and timely suggestions had been Linda's only lessons in wholesome cooking.

"Then I don't know how to sew well. I cain't teach, hard as I've tried to study since you've been among us. What can I do?"

They had come now to the little home. As they saw none of the boys of the household, the girl handed her pail of milk to Miss Wells, put the pony in the stable, and shook down a bundle of oats for him. The two then went around to the kitchen, where they found Mrs. Gentry preparing supper. The listless, careworn woman brightened noticeably at sight of the newcomer. "Walk in an' set down while I finish supper," she said cordially.

"No, Aunt Sarah; I'll get supper ready. You go right on in the house an' have a talk with Miss Wells while me an' the girls do up the night work."

"Well, now, that's real good of you, Lindy. Send Callie to the spring house to git the milk an' butter, an' tell Susan to put the white cloth on the table."

"Don't go to so much trouble for me, Mrs. Gentry."

"That's all right. Since you've stayed with us, somehow I don't feel right usin' a oilcloth. It don't 'pyear to be clean."

The two went on into what served as hall, living room, and bedchamber. In one corner steep stairs ran up to the half story above. A smaller bedroom opened into the larger one. The house was shabbily built, poorly lighted, and poorly furnished; but there were signs that some one of the family had an instinct for beauty. Flowers were placed here and there, some of

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them wild, others from the yard, where a few of the old-fashioned favorites brightened the rather desolate look of the home.

"I was just thinking I'd have a talk with you about Linda, Mrs. Gentry. If we could arrange for her to go away to school, could you manage without her?"

The youngest child, a girl of three, had slipped quietly in and was standing by her mother's chair. Mrs. Gentry snatched the child up and held her close to her bosom. "I don't see how I could git on without Lindy, Miss Wells. Do you think I *ought* to give her up? It don't seem right jest when I've got her so she can tek hold an' give me some rest. She can he'p with the little uns so much better than the other girls, an' I depend on her to do all the best ironin' an' right smart o' the washin'."

"Yes, I know it would be hard on you; but I think you are too good a woman to stand in her way."

Miss Wells had touched the right spring. The woman was little used to appreciation, and this imputing good motives to her stirred all her best impulses. "Well, of course I'd hate to keep her jes' to please myse'f. It'd be sorter selfish, wouldn't it? An' Lindy's such a smart girl she'd do well wherever she goes. But I have thought she liked Harry Turner. Ef that's so, maybe she wouldn't want to go 'way."

"O, she's too young to know her own mind about a thing of that sort!"

"I don't know 'bout that. Girls 'round here marry pow'ful young. My first baby was born before I was as old as Lindy."

"But you wouldn't like for Linda or your own daughters to have the cares you had at that early age?"

"No, I wouldn't. It makes a girl old befo' her time. Anyhow, where's the money to come from?"

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"I've thought of that. At the Sunday School Convention at Cullowhee a Mr. Willingham was there in the interests of the Brevard School. I talked with him, and they are doing fine work. He told me of one girl who walked twelve miles to reach the railroad on her way to the school. Some of the pupils pay full rates, others help work their way through, and still others are helped by the different home mission societies of your Church."

"Ain't that fine to give po' girls such a chance?"

"I spoke to him of Linda. Haven't mentioned it to her because I wanted to talk to you first, and then see if there was any chance to get her in."

As a result of this conversation Miss Wells set herself to work. Though not a member of the church doing mission work through the Brevard School, she wrote to the leaders of the Home Mission Society and secured their interest. Before long arrangements were made by which Linda might enter the school and not feel that she was a beneficiary. Certain work was open for her, and the President was empowered by a woman of means to aid the girl in buying books and other necessities.

When the news came to Linda that she was to enter this open door, light flooded her soul. Generous impulses throbbed with every heart-beat. When the fullness of life was hers, how much good she would do! Aunt Sarah and all the children should feel the benefit of her uplifted powers. These things she tried to express in her grateful talks with Miss Wells, who caught her half-told meaning and answered her in sweet, wise words that prepared her for some of the struggles before her and still did not chill the glow of her enthusiasm.

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Into these hopes came no disturbing thought of the young man whose preference for her had attracted the attention of Mrs. Gentry and others. The world lying beyond those mountain peaks promised so much that there was no room in her mind for girlish dreams of love.

The Sunday before she was to leave for the school there was an afternoon service in the little church nearest the Gentry home. It was one of Miss Wells's Bible-readings; and here the young people of the community gathered to listen, to question—if they would—and to have their opening minds stirred to thoughts of kindness and unselfish service.

On leaving the church young Turner came to her, and the two were soon passing through the fragrant woods behind the other young members of the Gentry household. The girl talked brightly. The youth that was in her had waked to unwonted vigor. At last the young man said: "I reckon you are mighty glad to go 'way."

"O, I am *so* glad to get this chance of goin' to school! I hate some to leave home, but I do want to learn. O, I am that thankful! Living seems like it's worth something now."

"You'll go 'way an' forget yo' ol' friends, maybe."

The youth was awkward, self-conscious, and ill-developed. He did not know his own capacities. His simple round of duties on his father's farm, a few winter months of school, and the narrow social life of the community had constituted his world. Yet the primal feelings of manhood were his, and all his strength of brain and heart responded to the charm of the girl beside him.

"No, no; I don't intend to forget anybody. You

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don't think a little education's goin' to make my heart worse, do you? Why, I hope I'll have a better heart an' mind, both."

He looked at her with the humility of a great love shining through his eyes. "You're already so far ahead o' me that you make me ashamed o' myse'f, Lindy."

"What makes you feel that way? I don't know any more in school books than you do. Don't you remember how you used to work my sums for me?" and she smiled brightly in a frank, comrade fashion.

"Yes, but you could beat me in ever'thing else. And now that you've been readin' these here books I never heard tell of, you're clean out o' sight."

"Why don't you read, too? You know Miss Wells keeps books a-purpose to lend."

"I don't know—hardly."

"I know," and there was a return of the old bitterness which had been in abeyance of late. "You've never been made to feel that you need it. Your mother and father an' ever'body acts just like a man was better than a woman, anyhow. We're always kept down, an' the only way I see for a girl to amount to anything is for her to use her eyes an' tongue while she's young an' good-looking. If she marries, there's nothin' to keep her from bein' a slave. Look at Aunt Sarah. She's just thirty-eight years ol', and she looks like she was fifty. An' you know there ain't a man in the settlement that's not willin' for his women folks to go into the field, besides doin' all the washin' an' everything." The young man looked dumbly at her. The girl went on with an air of defiance: "O, I know this sort of talk is strange to you; but I've watched close, an' if I never say a word to anybody but Miss Wells, I've felt it. I spoke about Aunt Sarah because

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she's just like the rest of the women. I'd rather be dead than living such a life." Her eyes flashed, her cheeks flamed with a rush of color. She looked at the young man as if expecting resentment.

He hesitated, mentally pulling himself together, then spoke with a touch of dignity that overmastered his awkwardness: "I don't know how much o' that you're meanin' for me jes' to warn me off, but I'm goin' to have my say; then it'll all be over. You cain't he'p knowin' that you're the only girl in the world to me. I loved you when I was goin' to school an' used to stan' next to you in spellin' class; and, somehow, I felt glad that it was you that stood head most o' the time. Thinkin' of you has kept me straight all these years. If I ever felt like takin' a dram with the boys, I'd stick it out because you don't believe in it. An' I've tried to shut my eyes an' ears many a time to things that a young fellow oughtn't to know about—jes' for your sake. I didn't talk to you about marryin', but I couldn't he'p showin' to ever'body that I was a fool over you. I'm poor; but I had thought, maybe, sometime you'd care a little, an' I could wait an' work. But feelin' like you do, it's the best thing that you're goin' away. I'll not worry you any more."

Only those who know the contradictory nature of the eternal feminine can guess at the workings of Linda's mind. The manliness of the boy's speech, the self-respecting spirit that animated it touched her as much as the words of love. She looked up at him, the color gone from her cheek, and spoke softly: "I'm sorry if I was rough. I do care—a little; and if you'll go to work and make a real *man* of yourself, I'll try harder at Brevard to make a woman worthy of you."

CHAPTER II.

THE MOTTO.



The east-bound train pulled up at Nantahala, a little wayside station whose sole interest lay in the fact that it possessed one of the musical Indian names that hold a charm for the traveler who penetrates the mountains of western Carolina. A horse and buggy stood near the little wooden building that served as a depot. On the platform were a young girl and a boy of fifteen or thereabout. A diminutive, tin-covered trunk stood on end near the edge of the platform.

After the train stopped the agent came out of the depot and helped the girl on, telling the lad to come in with her if he wished. "You'll only have two or three minutes to stay. Maybe you'd better get off with me," said the agent to the boy after securing a seat for the girl and seeing that she was settled therein.

"Good-by, Lindy." There was no appearance of feeling in the phlegmatic air of the lad.

But the girl held out her hand, and tears came to her eyes: "Good-by, Bob. Tell Aunt Sarah I'm all right. She mustn't be uneasy about me."

"Well, I'll tell her. Take kyer o' yo'se'f, Lindy."

"I will. Good-by, Bob. Take care of yo' mother, an' don't let her work too hard."

Two ladies who were sitting near each other exchanged significant looks. "I like that," said the elder of the two. "And do you notice how pretty she is?"

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"With development she'd be a beauty. Her hair is wonderful—such rich, splendid gold—and her complexion is perfect. Where did she get those regular features? Ah, I would like to have her and a full purse just to see her blossom out."

"You would need time also, my dear. The air that is necessary comes only by long training. It's not so much the shabby clothes that spoil her beauty as her evident awkwardness and self-consciousness."

"Anyway, she is a good subject for experiment. She has the look of native ability."

"I wish—I have half a mind——"

"You might talk to her. Of course you'll have to find out a great many things before you make her an offer."

The older lady soon left her seat and took a vacant one just back of the newcomer. Leaning over and lightly touching the girl's shoulder, she said: "I beg your pardon, but you will allow an old lady to be sociable. You look so young, and I suppose you're unused to traveling."

The lovely eyes looked into hers with a world of expression. An appealing timidity, gratitude, trustfulness shone from them. "I've never been on a train before"—this with a little apologetic air. "I've never been away from home except for a day or so, an' I do feel strange."

"You are going away for a visit?"

"No, ma'am; I've started to Brevard to school."

"O! Into that beautiful country? I suppose you are accustomed to the mountains; but to those of us who live in the low countries, Brevard Toxaway, and all up there are dreams of loveliness. We think Waynesville and its surroundings are quite as pretty. Do you know Waynesville?"

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"No, ma'am; but I'm goin' to stay there to-night."

"Ah! We're to spend the night there. Later we will go to Eagle's Nest. My niece and I feel that a summer is lost if we do not visit western Carolina."

"Yes, ma'am."

"My home is in Savannah, and the hot weather there is very depressing to me. My physician hurries me off to the mountains every year, and tries to keep me there till frost. I go back stronger than when I leave, and the memory of all this beauty brightens me for the whole winter. It's a wonderful country—magnificent! Such sunsets as you have in the autumn! I was in the Eagle's Nest through September and October once, and I shall never forget the wealth of coloring. The woods were in flames, and the skies seemed to be trying to outshine them—such rich crimson and gold sunsets. I can't imagine more perfect beauty. But I am letting my tongue run away. I forget myself when talking of these things that have long ago become common to you."

"I like to hear you." There was absolute sincerity of voice and manner. "I don't know how to tell what I mean, but I do love the mountains. They've always seemed like ol' friends to me; an' a heap o' times, when things were wrong, I've gone off to myself where I could see the Bald an' stayed till I'd feel better—a little like talkin' to yo' mother, I reckon."

"Your mother isn't living?"

"No'm; she died when I was a baby, an' my father didn't live many months longer."

"And you've made your home with relatives?"

"Yes'm; my aunt took me an' raised me."

"And this is your first experience in leaving home to attend school?"

"Yes'm."

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Invited by the lady's friendly sympathy, Linda, usually so reticent, told of her struggles for an education—struggles that were half-hearted till the coming of Miss Wells, a returned missionary from India, who had left her home in Chicago to work in the Carolina mountains. She spoke with the most grateful appreciation of Miss Wells's interest in herself, of the help and encouragement that friend had given her, and finally of the plan by which she was to receive the year's schooling in Brevard.

"After that, what next?"

"I don't know. Maybe I can learn to do something out in the world—make a living for myself an' be able to help Aunt Sarah an' the children. That's what I'd like."

There was something about the young girl calculated to inspire confidence. Her beauty, obscured as it was, so appealed to the older woman that it required an effort on the latter's part to avoid doing a foolish thing. Now that her niece had married and was living in a distant city, she was on the lookout for a young girl to serve as companion for herself. She was inclined to try to engage this stranger, but prudence interfered. "I am a lonely woman, but I have not lost sympathy with youth. I love young people; and if I can be of any service to you, won't you write to me?" and she opened her satchel to find a card.

Linda took the card: "Mrs. De Jarnette. Do I pronounce the name right?"

"Yes; we accent the first syllable now. That's a concession to the English tongue. It's French and was once pronounced differently."

"It's a pretty name."

"Your name is—Linda, the young man called you?"

"Linda Graham."

→ not an altogether common name west of the Blue Ridge but there are Grahams scattered throughout the mountain region

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"Then you are Scotch. Graham is a good name."

"I don't know much about such things. I reckon I don't know much, anyhow," and the girl smiled. When she did so, her beauty was wonderfully heightened. In repose her face had a wistful look, as though the young spirit were looking out on life with doubtful questioning; but with the smile the genius of youth and hope asserted itself and glorified her face.

Homesick, her heart aching for mother love, her life empty in ways she dimly realized but did not understand, she was in a mood to respond to every kindly touch. The sympathetic manner of the lady had broken down the barriers, and she had opened her heart in unwonted fashion. When she looked at the well-dressed woman who seemed so unconscious of what she wore, a sudden shame possessed her—shame because of her own shabby apparel and because she could not forget her clothes. But Mrs. De Jarnette's manner did not long leave her ill at ease. With Southern warmth she showed her interest in every detail of the girl's life and every hope for her future.

Before they reached Waynesville Linda was introduced to Mrs. Scott, the elder lady's niece, and found her so kind and gracious that she began to think the outer world was made up of kindness and grace.

At Waynesville Linda looked about her in bewilderment. She drew back from her new acquaintances as if she feared to force herself on their attention; but the train had scarcely stopped before an elderly lady came on, and, looking through the coach, singled Linda out as the girl whom she sought.

"Miss Linda Graham?" and a friendly handclasp followed the affirmative answer. "I am Mrs. Eccles."

In a few moments they were driving toward one of

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the lovely homes of the village. To Linda it seemed a dream. She had never been in a carriage before. She was entirely unused to ladies who are of the world in its best sense—women who have the ripe culture, the beautiful manners that come only by contact with other fellow-beings who have read, thought, suffered, and lived broadly.

Mrs. Eccles was one of the leaders in the society by which the Brevard school was controlled. She had become interested in Linda through correspondence with Miss Wells, and had invited the young girl to spend a night with her on her way to school. She found Linda answering her in monosyllables; and as she set her powers to work to try to get closer to the girl, she began to fear failure.

Perhaps it was the inborn air of the *grande dame*, perchance it was the calm dignity which belongs to forceful characters—whatever it was, there was something about her that overawed the girl who had just opened her heart in frank confidence to the emotional Southern nature of Mrs. De Jarnette.

After the evening meal was over and the two sat in the library, the talk turned to books. Then Linda gradually gave rein to her thoughts and showed her would-be friend a glimpse into a mind of rich natural beauty, though one but ill-developed because of poor opportunity. She had read few books. There were none in her aunt's home save the Bible and two or three volumes bought from agents; but Miss Wells had turned over to her use a small, select library. A half dozen novels of a wholesome sort, a few devotional books, Tennyson, Longfellow, and others of our English-speaking poets—these she had read with crude but original insight. Miss Wells had wisely

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forborne any pre-criticism, so that the author's impression on the plastic mind was absolutely genuine.

After a long talk in which the girl had let her soul, overbearing all timidity, loose its tether and reach out after the sweeter and finer things of life, Mrs. Eccles went to a shelf and, taking down a volume, said: "Here's a book I want to give you, Linda. I have marked it myself. Perhaps you'll enjoy it the more for that." Standing under the arc light, she read aloud, noting as she did so the changing play of feeling on her listener's face. It was Sidney Lanier's poems, and the reader turned the pages in search of those lines wherein the spiritual beauty of the man best expressed itself. As she marked the responsiveness of this child of nature, whose face quivered, whose eyes shone over passages of unusual beauty, she felt a great pity and anxiety for the untried soul standing at the open door of life with its temptations, its awful responsibilities, its divine possibilities. When she came to the line in "The Marshes of Glynn," "I will build me a nest on the greatness of God," she laid her hand gently on the girl's fair head, and, brokenly murmuring a few words, knelt with her, and the great heart of the woman poured its mother love out in a prayer for this motherless one who was going into a new life and would need infinite wisdom, infinite love to guide her.

When they arose, they looked into each other's eyes. Tenderest sympathy glowed on the older woman's face. From the tear-wet eyes of the young one a great purpose shone. "I will 'build me a nest on the greatness of God,'" she softly murmured.

Thus passed Linda's first day away from home—a day that told mightily on the after years of her life,

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so great are the seemingly small things along our way. A smile here to a stranger, a kindly word there, and God's opportunity has come. Souls touch, and new-born life springs up to vivify and brighten many lives.

CHAPTER III.

A BOY'S WAY.

He was scarcely more than a lad, but hope and virile energy and newly awakened ambition stirred the springs of his being. He trod the hillsides as if walking among the stars. Every wild flower and bush and tree shone with fresh beauty, seen as they were through the glorified medium of his love.

His body became to him a temple consecrated to the finer uses of his spirit. He would look at his hands, hardened by contact with plow and hoe, and think how their rugged strength could fend for a woman, for her and—he blushed in maiden modesty at the thought—for her children.

The woman! Ah, through the waking hours of day and the happy dreams of night moved the slender figure of a girl with shining eyes and sunny hair and tender, wistful look. For days after saying good-by to her he seemed to hold his strength in leash and gather his forces for some great movement. It was as if an athlete were resting himself for the final struggle, drawing deep breaths and measuring the strength and staying powers of his opponent as well as the difficulties of the track before him.

When he felt that the time had come for some definite move toward that larger life which his ambition was forecasting, he struck across fields and through woods to see the woman whose goodness had planned for the girl whom he loved.

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"I have never known the boy," Miss Wells thought as she looked into his face and listened to his quiet voice.

He began by saying that he had come to her for books. Then gradually, as the sympathetic and tactful woman drew him out, he told her of the new hope that was brightening his life—how he expected to work with the girl's half promise shining as a star before him. The very poetry of love trembled through his simple speech and gave it beauty and dignity. His awkwardness yielded to a self-possession born of overmastering emotion.

"I wish you the best, the highest success," said Miss Wells. "Nowadays when a young man determines to educate himself there's always a way. Have you any definite plans?"

"No, ma'am." The boy used the crude Southernism with an air that spoke of manliness and chivalrous reverence for woman. "I haven't talked to father. He can't well spare me now. It will soon be time to gather fodder, and then the corn. I don't see how he can do without me this fall."

"But you should be in school now, without waiting another week."

"I haven't got the money. I had thought maybe I could help the neighbors gather their crops and make something that way. I hope to go after Christmas—somewhere."

"You are not prepared for the university?"

"I don't know, ma'am."

In a few pointed questions she sounded the lad. "It might be well for you to spend this year in a good preparatory school. What of Professor Harrison's, in the valley? That is not expensive."

"I had thought of that."

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"Would you like for me to write to him about you? I'd be glad to do so."

"Thank you, Miss Wells; you are so good."

"In the meantime take this book. Get off to yourself and read a few of the essays, then tell me your opinion of them. I can tell better what to give you to read after that."

"I'd think you'd be a mighty happy woman, doin' so much good. The whole settlement's different since you've lived among us."

"It does make me happy to hear you talk that way, and I can have no richer reward for anything I can do than to see my young friends leading noble lives."

Harry left her with a sense of elation, of masterful courage filling his heart. He could, he *would* accomplish great things and bring his success to the girl who had only halfway given herself to him. She should yet find him worthy of a full and free surrender.

On the way home he turned off from the beaten trail and struck out along the mountainside till he came to a place he had often visited in his boyhood. Here steep, overhanging rocks lifted their heads above a dense forest which covered the hillside. On the brow of one of these projecting rocks he threw himself down beneath the shade of a rugged pine and opened his book.

When Harry Turner sent his mind questing in the wide spaces opened up by the Concord sage, it was as if some young Balboa should stand upon a lofty eminence and with far-seeing eye should sweep the boundless waters of the Pacific. He read eagerly, hungrily on. Deep in his nature a revolution was taking place. Old, careless habits of thought were giving way to a mighty force. He laid his book down

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and looked inward upon himself—upon the new man that was waking to such fullness of life.

A stir in the wood struck Harry's attention. Looking up, he saw a gentleman coming toward him—a stranger and evidently a man from that great outer world to which his thoughts were continually turning these latter days. The boy still lay with his book open on the grass.

"Good evening." The man sat down near the lad.

"Howdy." The response was a little shy.

"Reading, are you?"

"Yes, sir."

"May I look at your book?" The boy handed him the volume. "Ah, Emerson! Where did you get acquainted with him?"

"A friend lent me the book."

"Do you like it?"

The young fellow's eyes shone. "It's fine. I never read anything like it."

"One never knows what to look for in this land of surprises. Now, I've been led to think you folks away off here care little about books."

"Yes, sir. I reckon you thought we all say 'you uns.' I know just how most folks think about us. But we do know a little, an' we don't say 'you all' when we mean one person, an' we *have* heard that the war is ended."

They looked at each other and smiled.

"I'm revising my opinion right along. You're a pretty shrewd lot. I've seen men in these mountains who have as much philosophy as Emerson, and sometimes it's of a more practical sort." He turned the leaves of the book, dipping into it here and there. "A young man could hardly fail to get inspiration from such a book. Do you care much for reading?"

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"I haven't had many books—a few histories and the lives of Lee and Jackson. My father fought through the war, and we are interested in such things."

"And you've learned to hate us—the Yankees—I guess?"

"No; father has a pretty good opinion of the Yankees when it comes to a fight."

"That's good. It begins to look like the war really had ended. Do you expect to go to college? I've found a good many young fellows hereabout are going to the university."

"I wish I could."

The man looked at the boy intently. He began to speak, then paused. Harry waited expectantly. The stranger finally went on: "Do you know this neighborhood well?"

"I've hunted through these woods all my life."

"You know that Coon Bletcher has a distillery somewhere in these cliffs, not far from where we now are."

Harry said nothing, but looked the other in the face with admirable self-mastery.

The stranger went on: "You must know that moonshining has been a curse to western North Carolina. Now that prohibition has had time to get in her work, the trouble is lessening. In a few years the business will be a thing of the past. In the meantime those who help us break up this lawlessness will do the whole country good."

"I think you're mistaken. Our county was nearly shet of stills before prohibition passed. There's been mighty little moonshinin' here since I could remember."

"Perhaps it has been better in your county, but as a

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whole the mountains have been cursed by it. I'll tell you—say, can't you show me that distillery?"

"Wha-a-t?" Incredulous astonishment was expressed in the gentle drawl.

"Tell me where it is. Show me, and I'll see to it that you go to the State University." The man leaned forward and watched the lad's face.

Slowly the fire kindled in the boy's eyes. His nostrils dilated, his mouth curved contemptuously. "Do you mean to offer me pay for being a sneak and a scoundrel?"

"O, let's have no heroics. That's just as you look at it. The South thought John Brown a villain; the North considered him a martyr. If you could help to break up the making of a deadly poison, wouldn't you think it your duty to do so?"

The boy looked out beyond the man, down the thickly clad mountain side, across the verdant valley, and far toward the blue line of the horizon. He had been taught that it was a crime to report a distiller. This code of honor among his neighbors was as binding as the law of honesty. His training bade him shun the man. His hunger for education caused him to hesitate.

"Mind you, I am not tempting you to do what I consider a wrong thing. I have been employed to break up these distilleries. Good men are paying me for the time I'm putting into it, and you shall be liberally rewarded if you help me."

The young fellow's mind was unused to any fine discriminations between right and wrong. The half-hidden temptations that assail men in the world of business had never come his way. He looked into the man's face as if seeking the motive back of the offer.

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"Do you reckon that's a square thing to do? Me and Coon Bletcher went to school together. Why, he's not much older than I am, and, besides, he's got a wife an' little baby to take care of! No, sir-ee! I just cain't do it." He sprang to his feet and reached for his book. "I must be goin', sir."

The stranger laughed.

"He that fights and runs away,
May live to fight another day,"

he quoted. "That's all right. If you can't see it as I do, you ought to refuse."

The two parted, going in opposite directions. After the man was well out of sight and hearing, the lad turned his course, plunging through the thick undergrowth down the mountain side. As he went his mind was filled with thoughts of the distiller's wife and child. Only the Sunday before he had seen them at Miss Wells's meeting, the babe bright and sweet, the young mother proud and happy. Why, it would be a brute that could break up the little home. He had come to a part of the mountain side so steep that he was forced to let himself down by swinging from one stout shrub to another. He dropped from the lower limb of a tree and landed himself at the end of a path that wound up the hillside and lost itself in the laurel bus. He slipped aside the undergrowth and crept softly onward, calling: "Coon, Coon! Come out. It's nobody but me—Harry Turner."

There was absolute stillness. He pressed on till he came to the object of his search—the narrow mouth of a cave. Again he paused. To go on might mean death if Coon was there and failed to recognize

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him. "Coon," he cried in a subdued voice, "don't you know me?"

"Shucks! Harry Turner, you've had me skyeered 'most to death. Come on in, but you know I'm ready to shoot ef there's airy bit o' meddlin'."

Harry bent low and passed through the opening into the cave. Coon was standing near the entrance with his gun pointed toward the newcomer. The latter looked calmly into the distiller's face. "Put down your gun, Coon. I won't do you any harm, an' I reckon you ain't 'specially anxious to git yo'se'f hung."

"Well, I don't know's I'm hankerin' fur the hemp, an' I ain't any too anxious to see the inside o' that Yankee jail in Atlanta. Uv co'se you know what's a-goin' on in this yere cave, but I don't believe I've got airy neighbor low-down enough to peach on me."

Coon motioned Harry to a seat, and himself dropped down on a rough block and laid his gun across his knees. "See here, Coon," said Harry, "you don't need this sort o' life. Why don't you quit it, anyway?"

"It's mighty easy for you to talk—all you folks that's got a home o' yo' own. How could I git bread an' meat offen my few acres o' po' land? It won't hardly sprout peas, and the only thing that's wuth shucks on it is the orchard my po' ol' daddy planted. Ef I ain't allowed to use the fruit the Lord put there, what can I do? You cain't sell it jes' so; an' ef you can tu'n it into sumpin you can sell, whose business is it, I say?" He spoke defiantly, his eyes shifting uneasily the while.

"But there's danger in it, Coon. Law is law, even if we don't see the right of it. You know blockin' has led to a heap o' trouble in these mountains. It's all wrong, the whole business, an' you must git out of it."

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"Must?"

"Yes, *must*. That's a strong word, but as a friend I'll say it. There's a stranger in the settlement now. I don't know exactly what he is—revenue spy or something. He's on the hunt for you—I know that."

Coon gripped his gun and scowled. His uneasy life was hardening his nature, and the strain of it was beginning to show on his youthful face. He prefaced his words with a string of oaths, then went on: "Let him come in reach o' me, an' I'll give him a dose to last him many a day."

"Then what would become of your wife and baby?"

"Go to the po'house, I reckon."

"What about the disgrace you'd bring on your little girl? I tell you, Coon, the right way is the one, after all."

The shadows were lengthening when the two came out into the sunlight, but Harry's pleading had won. He carried with him Coon's promise that his still would be forever closed, and in his own heart was the glad consciousness that a fellow-being had been uplifted through his help. Again he walked as if among the stars. A woman's love is not all of life. In the depths of his soul was the stirring of new forces—love for his brother-man, a sweet recognition of kinship with Infinite Love, and a sense of humble gratitude that through him Infinite Good might work to noble ends.

CHAPTER IV.

LINDA AT SCHOOL.

This seemed a new world into which Linda Graham had come. During the first few days waves of homesickness would drown all other feelings. She longed for the old familiar surroundings—the little lonely farm-house, the spring beneath the big water oaks, the cows browsing in their pasture, the noble hills sweeping around her, and over all the Bald keeping its eternal watch. The mountains were here around the beautiful town, but they seemed alien to the eyes that had gazed on the same scenes for a lifetime. As the weeks passed she adjusted herself to the new conditions and began to win from them a deep happiness. She felt a sense of space and freedom hitherto unknown in her experience. She fell easily into the routine of school life. The daily recitations brought the consciousness of a power that thrilled her with joy. She found that mentally she could keep step with the leaders in her class, and soon this fact began to tell on her intercourse with the girls of the school. Instead of dreading the keen eyes of strangers, fearful lest they discover something laughable in manners or attire, she gradually became at ease among her fellows. And while she watched other girls and took many an unoffered hint as to dress and deportment, she felt less constraint among them and learned to make the best of her scant wardrobe.

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Her work in sewing room, laundry, and dining hall was a pleasure rather than a burden. From it she fed her independence of spirit and unconsciously strengthened her character. From it, too, her love of beauty drew sustenance. Orderliness and the joy of attainment grew as she fashioned a garment or watched the dainty shirt waist or serviceable linen come from the pressure of her iron. Especially did she gather pleasure from her duties in the dining hall. The neatly kept tables were wonderfully attractive to the girl who had been accustomed to seeing the meal time pass as if it were a few moments snatched from work and used for the display of boorish manners. Along with other girls who attended to the dining room, she would search the woods for wild flowers and later for ferns and autumn leaves with which to decorate her table. Often at such times she would feel a pang of pity for the ones at home, accustomed as they were to the oilcloth-covered table, the rough ware, and unseemly manners.

She resolved to work for a better order of things when vacation should come. Mentally she planned little means by which she would change the home methods. She could manage. There would be more linen, even though it must be of an inferior sort. Flowers would brighten the table. The children must be appealed to in unobtrusive ways, and thus perhaps the older ones might be reached.

As her intercourse with other girls broadened and deepened, life took on a richer fullness. She stood tip-toe, looking out toward the brightening horizon.

One morning, a few weeks after entering school, she was passing through the hall when one of the day pupils met her. The girl ran to Linda and, throwing her arms about her, cried: "O, you beauty!

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I don't believe you begin to know how awfully pretty you are. We all think you are quite the prettiest girl in school, but you never seem to dream of such a thing. Didn't anybody ever tell you about it?"

"No—O, no!" and the delicate face flushed.

"Do you know, if I were a man I'd simply haunt you? You'd have to love me."

"Don't! don't!" said Linda in real distress.

"O, it's true!" went on the mischievous girl; "but I ought not to tell you. If we spoil you by making you think of your looks, you'll not be half so pretty. But tell me about yourself and your people. You know, I'm a 'mountain white,' as mother says, and we must be good friends. You'll get over being shy, and you'll like the girls, I'm sure. Now talk to me," and Fannie Everett drew Linda toward the front door.

Soon the girls were walking slowly back and forth in front of the building while Linda's timidity was giving way before Fannie's warm impetuosity. This was the beginning of a friendship which gave to the motherless girl one of her greatest pleasures.

The Everetts were among the leading people of the county. They were possessed of that culture which elevates both head and heart. Hospitality was one of their chief characteristics, and soon Linda was a frequent visitor in their home. Here she began to see life at its best—a life where kindness and gentle courtesy added to material beauty and made up an ideal existence. Mrs. Everett was one of the most motherly of women. Her assured position in the best society of town and county had never given her an air of conscious superiority. Genuine kindness and unselfishness predominated in her nature; and when Fannie, to use her enthusiastic phrase, "fell

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in love" with Linda, the mother was ready to do anything in her power to further the friendship.

During the Christmas vacation Linda was an honored guest in the Everett home. For her, in her isolated life, the happy season had meant little. Usually there had been a few gatherings at which some of the young men were almost sure to be under the influence of liquor. To one of Linda's native tendency to refinement these little parties were trials rather than pleasures. Looking back now, she wondered that she had endured one.

On Christmas eve all was joyous commotion in the home. Mrs. Everett's brother, a physician from a large town below the mountains, was expected to spend the holidays with them. He was a prime favorite with Fannie and the younger children, and all were excited at the prospect of his visit. When the carriage drove up with Mr. Everett and Dr. Montague there was a glad rush through the hall, and the children gathered on the porch in spite of the snow that blew this way and that in hearty Christmas style.

"Come, Linda," cried Fannie, dragging her friend through the hall; but Linda drew back at the front door and retreated to the brilliantly lighted parlor. The sound of merry voices, heart-free laughter, the stamping of feet to shake off the gathering snow brought again to the girl that old ache—the sense of being an alien, homeless, not fitting into any place, but ever unresting, ever one to herself.

When they crowded into the parlor Fannie ran to her. "Uncle Win, this is my best friend, Linda Graham. Dr. Montague, Miss Graham."

She looked up into his face. He held out his hand with a friendly smile. "I may be allowed a handshake, then." He was prepared to treat the girl as

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if she were half child, half woman; but when he looked down into her eyes and watched the changing face he felt that here, in spite of her youth, was a girl who had overstepped the last boundary into womanhood. Here was not simply the care-free thoughtlessness of Fannie and her kind, but the half sadness that comes with life's later experiences. He gently dropped her hand and turned to the little folks, who were clamoring for his attention. A toss-up of the baby, a merry joke with the boys, a mammoth hug for demure little Elizabeth, and the group was filled with bubbling happiness.

The earlier part of the evening was given to the children. At the supper table bright talk of Santa Claus was bandied about, and each child was invited to tell just what the dear old Saint should bring him. After the tots had been put to bed, Dr. Montague arose. "I say, Lizzie, if you don't happen to have the things your youngsters are expecting, I'd like to serve as Santa to-night myself."

"They have everything they need. Your questions made them think of things that might never have entered their minds."

"Well, I'm going out to find those very things."

"O, don't go and buy a whole menagerie. If you are anxious to spend your money, you may help me with the work we are trying to do for a few poor families."

"Mamma, do let Linda and myself go with Uncle Win to fit up those children. I know exactly what I want for little lame Mamie Fisher."

"Isn't it too bad for the girls to be out, Winstead?"

"Bundle them up and let them come on. It's only fun to be out in the snow."

In a few moments they were dressed to go with

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him, Linda wearing a heavy wrap of Mrs. Everett's with the deep fur collar drawn up about her throat. "This is much warmer than your jacket, Linda, and you must please me by wearing it. Remember it is just as if Fannie should do so."

Linda looked into the gentle eyes and fought the tears back. "How good you are!" she said in a low voice. "I don't deserve it all."

"Yes, you do; and you must let me mother you all I wish."

With many a jest from Fannie and Dr. Montague they went forth to search the stores. As they neared the post office Fannie suggested that they inquire for mail. Dr. Montague brought out a batch and handed two letters to Linda. Standing under a street light, with the snow falling softly on her eager hands, the girl opened one of them. She caught a deep breath and looked at Fannie.

"What is it, Linda? You look daft, my dear."

"I was only thinking what a lovely world this is and how I've misjudged it." A tender light shone from her eyes. Her lips quivered.

Fannie took the extended letter. In an instant she grasped Linda's arm and shook it vigorously. "Isn't that fine? 'Let us all cry,' as Dr. Holmes would say. You dear old thing! How *do* you manage to make people love you so? Say, can I tell Uncle Win?"

"It wouldn't interest him."

Fannie turned to him. "Come, Uncle mine, let me read you a page from a fairy tale: '*Dear Linda*: I inclose you a check for a small sum [I think it princely]. I hope you will get as much pleasure from spending it as I am having in sending it to you. With good wishes and prayers that He whose spirit prompts all Christmas cheer may hold you in loving com-

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munion, I am your friend, Henrietta Eccles.' Now isn't that fine?"

"I think so."

"Come on, Linda, let's celebrate. You must have such a Christmas as you've never had before," and the happy girl linked her arm in her friend's, swung her around, and ordered, "Forward, march!"

Linda's heart thrilled with deep happiness. Over and over she was saying to herself: "'I will build me a nest on the greatness of God.'" The words carried her back to the night she had spent with Mrs. Eccles, when that noble woman broke down the barriers of Linda's timid reserve and went straight into the young heart's holy of holies. "I will be a better girl because I have the memory of such a friend. Lord, help me to be a little like her." She dared not hope for such richness of womanhood. That distinguished grace, that air of intellectual beauty mingled with a spiritual power that shone preëminent, made up a combination as rare as it was impressive.

Not until Linda was in her room alone did she open the other letter. For a long time she sat with the sheet in her hand, her face a study in conflicting emotions. She had been away from home five months, and this was only the third letter she had received from the young man. On the condition that their correspondence should be restrained and occasional she had agreed to write to him. Now she questioned the right and wisdom of allowing so much. She had acknowledged to a little interest, a little special feeling for him. She had gone farther and encouraged him to make greater effort toward building a real manhood for himself, holding out to him the hope of ultimate reward—a reward that could be construed to mean only one thing. Had she gone too far?

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She looked at the letter, written in a cramped, boyish hand, the English crude, the spelling imperfect, and a sense of shame possessed her. She thought of his awkwardness, his ill-fitting clothes, his lack of development at every point. She set him beside the men she had met in these school months, and she knew that shame would overwhelm her if she were forced to acknowledge before her new friends the relationship that really existed between them. Then she would upbraid herself for lack of loyalty in this, the first test her heart had endured. Again came the words: "I will build me a nest on the greatness of God." Should she allow a few outside circumstances to hide the boy's genuine worth? Was there any depth in the spiritual nature that professed to be building on God and at the same time looked on life with such shallow-seeing eyes?

She knew it had been hard for him to leave home and enter school. He had been working his way, chopping wood and doing odd jobs for his board. It humiliated her to remember that he was making this manly struggle while she was doubting and debating.

At last she folded the letter with a firm hand and rose to undress. Her mind was settled. She would be true to him. He was older than herself; but because of a girl's earlier maturity she had that feeling for him that women often have for men—a feeling in which the maternal is mixed with other and more complicated instincts. "He said I'd forget old friends." She went back in memory to that last walk through the sweet mountain woods. "It must not be. It *shall* not be."

CHAPTER V.

FRIENDS.

"Christmas gift! Christmas gift!" the children were shouting at her door when Linda waked. There was a scurry of little feet, a combined rush of restless little bodies and another door was assailed with merry cries and a tumultuous pounding of fists: "Uncle Win, Uncle Win; get up! Christmas gift! Christmas gift!"

A deep voice called, "Get out! Go 'way; go 'way, you little scamps, and let me have my beauty sleep."

"Tome on, Unc' Win. Yet see what Santa Taus b'ought us. Mamma said wait for you."

"All right, lady; I'll be down in a jiffy."

Before Linda was dressed Fannie came in and greeted her affectionately. "This must be a royal day for you, the first Christmas you ever spent away from home. We must make up to you for everything."

"You are doing more than that, Fannie. You must remember 'home' to me is very different from what the word means to you. I can't remember father or mother, and Aunt Sarah has never been able to make a real holiday time for us. You may think it strange, but I never had a Christmas present in my life 'till last night."

"Well, hurry up and see what Saint Nicholas is doing for you this time, you dear old darling."

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For a short while the household gathered in the big living room. A scene of joyous confusion followed. The glad voices of delighted children, the exclamations of the old cook, "Dar now, bress de Lawd—Thanky', thanky', Miss Lizzie, thanky', Mr. John"; the housemaid's voluble gratitude; Fannie's happy chatter, all served to create an atmosphere in which sadness would have been utterly out of place. Yet to Linda there came crowding thoughts that sobered her by contrast. In her memory's vision rose a shabby house meanly furnished. Where now she saw soft carpets, easy chairs, well bound books and tasteful pictures, in the other scene there were bare, rough walls and floors, home-made chairs—everything cheap and unlovely. The girl's heart ached as she recalled the familiar surroundings and saw the worn face and hopeless air of her mother's sister. The narrowness of the life smote her cruelly. She felt that she must get out of this sunlight, that she had no right to this bright, rich life while those to whom she was united by closest ties were shut up in such prison bounds. These thoughts were flashing through her brain while the children and servants were opening their packages.

"Now," cried Fannie; "we'll see our presents. Come on, Linda." The older ones gathered about the table. There was an elegantly bound set of books for Mr. Everett, different articles for Uncle Win, as each child must contribute to his store. A few pieces of exquisite china and some dainty books bore Mrs. Everett's name, but the family had spent most generously where the young girls were concerned.

The way in which the two received their presents showed how widely different their temperaments were, and yet Fannie's ah's and oh's, her happy effusiveness,

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held no hint of insincerity. On Linda's tell-tale face, appreciation, deep gratitude, amounting almost to pain, seemed to be struggling with the lighter feelings that she tried to express.

"Oh, come off, you goosey! I do believe you want to fall on my neck and weep. Let's dance instead," and Fannie swung Linda around the room in a mad whirl, keeping time to a merry tune as it came from her own daintily pursed-up mouth.

"Win, don't you think it's time for Fannie to stop whistling? It's a dreadfully tomboyish habit—to me—but her father seems to think it's a fine joke."

"Let her whistle, dear. There'll come a time, all too soon, when the child will not care to whistle."

"That's right, Daddy. Take up for me! I'll be fearfully and wonderfully dignified after my coming out. Don't you think that'll be time enough, Uncle Win?"

"I certainly do."

"Don't you see, mother, they are two to one? Come on and let me convert you." She paused a moment, released Linda and, throwing her arm about her mother's waist, waltzed rapidly around the room with her.

"How's that? Don't you feel better? Younger? More like the beautiful and accomplished Miss Montague in the days when she was the belle of central Carolina?"

"I feel like stopping and trying to get a breath. Do let me sit down, Fannie, I'm fairly gasping."

"I see; please forgive me, mother," and she led Mrs. Everett to an easy chair, gently seated her and stood by her with a serio-comic look on her face. "There now, you are coming to! It all goes to illustrate what I've been trying to teach you, that it's

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best to have a little fun as you go along. There's Linda with her tragedy-queen make-up. Watch her struggling for breath yet, while I'm perfectly calm. What is it Master William says?—"Your merry heart goes all the way, you're sad tires in a mile—a?" That reminds me, let me see your Shakespeare, Linda. I believe Daddy did the nice thing when he bought that for you." Linda picked up the two handsome volumes. "He did a beautiful thing and I don't know how to thank him enough."

"You like it? That pays me well," answered Mr. Everett.

"Now allow me to decorate you, Miss Graham," Fanny deftly adjusted a brooch at Linda's throat—"you behold your friend's perfect taste in this pin. Ma Mère was inclined to pearls and turquoise because of your blonde hair and complexion, but with your dark eyes and intense nature I thought the rose garnet better, so you have a real Carolina gem, one, too, peculiar to your native country. You haven't tried the ring, have you?" and she slipped a splendid Mexican opal on Linda's finger. "You know I refuse to believe in bad luck at all. This does look like flying in the face of a whole world's wisdom, but I know of no stone so pretty."

"It is lovely, and——"

"And you'd like to kiss me, but you're too timid to suggest it? Well, here goes."

With such happy badinage Fannie brightened the morning hours till the time came for the distribution of Mrs. Everett's gifts to her protégés.

At ten o'clock a sleigh was driven to the front and Dr. Montague and the two girls drove off with their well-filled baskets.

On Linda's cheek there was a soft flush, and in her

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eye a happy light. The contagion of Fannie's spirits had driven out the half-sad thoughts that came with the vision of her old home. She could not be unhappy in this atmosphere of genial friendship, of beautiful kindliness.

Enveloped in a long wrap which Mrs. Everett had just given her in the privacy of her own room, she was conscious that her appearance suggested neither poverty nor out-of-dateness, and the consciousness gave her ease of manner.

When Dr. Montague helped her into the sleigh he noted the glow on her face, the beauty there. As he seated himself by her side he marked her delicate profile, the perfection of nose and brow and mouth, and marveled that such flower-like loveliness could have blossomed in rough mountain surroundings.

The first stop was made at the home of the crippled child. Fannie and Linda went in, leaving Dr. Montague in charge of the horses.

"You will find gratitude here, Linda; but with some of mother's pets it's funny to see how her gifts are accepted. I want to take you to see Aunt Mad-cap."

Nannie's face was bright as the sunlight on the gleaming snow outside when Fannie opened her basket and undid the bundles. There was a warm sack for the thin little body, a big doll flaunting the most elegant clothes, candies and fruits galore, while the mother was gladdened with the sight of a dressed turkey, loaves of bread, a cake and other things to complete a Christmas feast. Mrs. Fisher's few broken words of thanks were eloquent with gratitude, and the two girls went out of the room with softened step and tremulous voices.

"I see now why people are opposing the Lady Bountiful business. It's the old feeling that steals

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our pleasure away by making us think we ought not to enjoy anything. I'm going to give more recklessly even than mother, and pat myself on the head for being good if I wish. Don't you think that's wise, Uncle Win?"

"Of course. I am not able to see the beauty of our modern philanthropy. If you see a poor fellow in need of a coat you surely wouldn't send a committee to inquire of his financial standing. However, I guess there is some excuse for organized charity. I've been fleeced often enough to be sure of that; but I go on just the same."

"Yes, here's Aunt Mad-cap, she ought to be under a Board of Directors, I suppose; but mother keeps on with the good work in spite of everything."

They alighted in front of a tumble-down cabin in the poorest part of the town. Fannie took a basket and the girls were soon in the shabby room.

"Christmas gift, Aunt Mad-cap," shouted Fannie in the old woman's ear. "How are you?"

"Pohly, pohly; why didn't your mother come?" and the old creature looked at the girl with marked disapproval.

"Oh, we wanted to come, we were so anxious to give you pleasure."

"Ugh—h," the groan was dismal enough, but the face gave sign of softening a little.

"Mrs. Everett has sent you such nice things, Aunt Mad-cap, and hopes you will enjoy them," said Linda, while they were unpacking the basket.

"Uncle Win has ordered you a load of coal. It will soon be here, Auntie."

"How come your Uncle Win to do that? Tryin' to save his soul by givin' to a ol' beggar?"

"No, he does it because his heart is big enough to

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take in the world. You ought to know Uncle Win. You'd change your mind about the badness of men in general."

"They are all bad, all bad," grumbled the woman.

"In spite of the coal, Auntie?"

"Yes, yes; I never knowed any good uns, and you youngsters better let 'em alone." There was a ferocious gleam in the dim old eyes, and the shriveled hand clutched savagely at the arm of her chair.

"O, but there are good and great men, Auntie. Remember that He who made Christmas what it is was once a man and walked the earth doing good."

Linda looked at her friend in astonishment.

"Mebbe I'd 'a' been a better woman if somebody had 'a' tol' me mo' about Him," answered the woman; "but I never knowed much about good folks. Yo' mother is mighty nigh the only good un I'm acquainted with. And you be sho' to tell her I'm much obleeged for all these nice things. You needn't say nary word to your uncle, though. I hate the men; Lord, I hate 'em!"

The voice rose to a shriek, and the poor fist was clenched. Fannie laid a gentle hand on the woman's head. "There, there, you must not excite yourself so. You'll feel better about these things yet."

Her voice was low and tender. A mother could not have spoken more soothingly to a fretful child. Again Linda looked the astonishment she felt.

As they left the cabin Fannie turned to her friend. "I must have shown you the shallow side of my nature always, you looked so surprised to see me trying to quiet the old creature."

"I was surprised to hear you speak as if——"

"As if I believed in Him whom we are trying to follow?"

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"Yes, that's it."

"Well, I do not wear my faith on my sleeve; but my love for Him is worth all the world to me, Linda, and it shames me because you can show your religion—*use* your religion so much more than I do."

"No, no, dear; you are full of the very essence of religion—love for everybody about you."

"I wish I could feel that you are not mistaken. But this poor, half-crazed woman always stirs me mightily. I've only learned lately just why she hates men. When her only child married, the husband turned out to be a drunkard, beat his wife, and was indirectly the cause of her death as well as that of her little babe. Since then Mad-cap has been just as she is now."

By the time the round of visits was made Fannie was her old mischievous self, but to her friend the morning had been a revelation, and when the day had passed Linda fell asleep soothed by happy thoughts. Above everything was the recognition that people about her had unsounded depths of feeling, of unimagined soul-beauty.

CHAPTER VI.

STEPPING STONES.

Linda felt dazed by the marvel of it. First there was the letter from Mrs. De Jarnette, offering her the position; then one from her aunt, giving her consent to its acceptance; and later the exciting matter of getting ready for life in this new world.

"Haven't I told you that it's better to be born lucky than rich? And what's to become of a poor body that's neither? Anyway, I'll be happy because you are having such a good time."

"Why, Fannie! You little goose! you have the loveliest home in the world, the dearest father and mother, and everything."

"Yes, indeed, I do have the most precious daddy, and mother is simply perfect; but I am so glad you are to have this chance of a beautiful life. Companion to a rich old lady, travel, the luxuries of a real city—why, it's more than ever like the pages of a fairy tale!"

"What if I do not suit the work or that kind of life?"

"You can very easily get out of it."

"And be the same girl?"

"O, now, there you are! 'Take the good the gods provide you.' You surely were born for a tragedy queen. If you fail as companion, I expect to see you starring as Lady Macbeth. You take life too seri-

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ously, darling. Be frothy, like your little goose of a friend."

"Frothy?" and Linda bent to kiss the girl's brow. "I know of no one who has more deep and genuine good in her, more unselfish thought for others, than you have, Fannie."

The commencement time passed most pleasantly to Linda. She was in and out of the Everett home, always a petted guest and unconsciously fashioning herself to a fitness for the social life which was so different from her own upbringing. There is a certain aptness in the feminine nature which catches the keynote of little things, and presto! the whole woman is rapidly changing. At first Linda had shown a conscious awkwardness of manner, a hesitancy as to what were the fitting thing to do; but gradually the ease of a well-poised nature became her own and added a new charm to the natural grace that had belonged to her in the secluded mountain home.

She had written to Aunt Sarah: "I will come home for three weeks. Mrs. De Jarnette gives me that time before I join her on the way to Eagle's Nest. Tell Miss Wells I hope she will be with us as much as possible. I can never be grateful enough to her for all she has done for me. And you, Aunt Sarah, I think of you so often, and wish that I could lighten your burdens for you. If Mrs. De Jarnette is satisfied with my work, it may be in my power to do more for you than I have ever been able to do. I would be ungrateful if I did not hope and plan for you after you have been a mother to me all these years."

When the train pulled up at Nantahala there was the same shabby buggy and one of the plow mules, accompanied by a boy in the gawkiest of all boy ages.

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"Lawdy, Lindy! I was erbout to tu'n 'roun' an' go back. Didn't think you wus here." The lad's look of bewilderment was a tribute to Linda's improved appearance.

The girl laughed softly and kissed her cousin, an act which seemed to complete his stupefaction. "How are you, Bob? and how are Aunt Sarah and the girls, and Bess and Muley and the calves—O, everything? I am in such a hurry to see them all."

"I'll git you there es soon es I can, but how in thunder do you expect me to carry that there barn?" He motioned toward a new trunk which had just been dumped onto the platform along with a tiny tin-covered one that had sufficed to carry the girl's clothes to school.

"That can be left here a day or two till it's more convenient for some of you to bring it home. My old trunk has all that is necessary for me at first."

Ten months had passed since the two had seen each other—ten months in the time of a girl's life when changes are miraculously quick. Linda had left home beautiful but unformed, slender, graceful except when hampered by self-consciousness; she had come back a girl of remarkable beauty, easy and gracious of manner, dressed in quiet, good taste, and yet in a way that seemed to emphasize, not hide, the native charm of her.

"Whoopee, Lindy, where'd you git that dress? You look to kill in it." Bob was surprised out of himself. His phlegmatic philosophy had not encountered so great a shock.

Linda laughed. "I'm awfully glad you like it, Bob. I was afraid you'd think I'm putting on airs. You see, Mrs. De Jarnette expects this sort of thing."

"You reckon you're going to like that job, Lindy?"

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I wouldn't want to wait on no rich woman." Bob gave his mule a mild jerk and looked at Linda as if to note the effect of his words.

The girl answered with grave dignity: "I will not be expected to do the work of a servant; rather I will hardly be treated as a servant. But, after all, we people of the mountains are too afraid of that kind of service. We are proud and sensitive to a fault. That's true of us the world over."

It was late in May. The mountains had on their most delicate coloring—the softest shades of green, the tenderest grays, and over all that mystic haze that gives an appealing beauty to the most rugged and cliff-scarred landscape. The wonder of it all struck to the heart of the girl. "As homesick as a Switzer for the sight of the mountains"—she had once heard the expression, and it set in a new light the life she had led. There was something in it, after all—something that made for strength of affection, of character. Did the unchangeable sturdiness of the hills so grow into the fiber of one's being that he could not altogether fashion himself differently?

That was a poor home-coming, one might say who had been accustomed to a larger sort of life. There were few words of welcome and but little show of any kind; but Linda noted that the girls and smaller children, along with their mother, had donned their "Sunday clothes," and even Uncle Bart had a gentler tone when he greeted her. There was something touching in the supper. The best cloth had been laid, and every one seemed to have on his company manners; yet the best in everything was crude or rough. When the meal was over Linda offered to help with the cleaning up.

"No," said her Aunt Sarah; "you mustn't mess up

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that pretty dress. Run erlong an' look erbout, ef you want to, while me 'n' the girls wash the dishes."

Linda was glad to be alone. Out under the starlit sky, with the deepening mist hanging around the sides of the Bald and filling the valley with a sea of softened light, the girl fought over some of her old battles. The sordidness of it all! After the comforts of her school life and the loveliness of her friend's exquisitely kept home how poor and hopeless seemed the things around her! She was thoroughly miserable in spite of her great love for her aunt. At the table the rough manners of her uncle and the boys had grated on her nerves. The spiritless conversation depressed her. How could she bear it—this poor and lifeless existence?

Out in the bright world she had left, men and women *lived*; they did not simply exist. And yet there was the ingratitude of such feelings. She *must* love her people—these who had cared for her in her childhood and helpless poverty. O, she did love them! She could not be so untrue as to forget.

She was leaning against the bars at the old gap, where so often she had come for quiet and self-communion. Linda's memory turned to that afternoon—so long ago, it seemed—when Miss Wells and her pony had come up the trail along the hillside. Even as she thought of it the sound of footsteps reached her. She stood alert, every nerve quivering. Could it be? Ah, if it were he, how should she greet him? Love is not love that questions so? Real love should be full of self-surrender, glad to yield, proud that one's soul has come upon this miracle of miracles. Surely she did not love, and all these months she had let the boy follow a shadow! She must be cruel in order to be kind, in order to be true.

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"O, Linda, is it you?" He held her hand for an instant. "I had started to see you. I—I—couldn't wait."

"How are you, Harry?" Her voice was composed, though a stronger light might have shown the whiteness of her face. "We will go on to the house."

"No, no, Linda; just a minute here. I reckon you oughtn't let a girl see what a fool you can be, but I can't help it. Father advised me to wait a day or so. He says a woman likes independence." There was a wistful tone in his voice, and he waited.

"It's sometimes hard to tell what a woman does like, Harry." The kindness she felt for him softened every look and word and gave him courage.

"I've been tryin' mighty hard these ten months to be what you'd like, Linda."

She could not bear to be harsh to him just yet. After the struggle he had been making it would be heartless to send him away. A little longer and she would tell him. "Did you like your school work, Harry?"

"Fine. I was lucky enough to get work to do in Mr. Harrison's home. It was Miss Wells that did it for me."

"Yes, I know."

"Mr. Harrison and his wife were both just as good to me as could be. They never made me feel that I was the 'hired man,' and bein' in such a home has been worth a whole heap to me. I had the use of their library, and found out from them what a young fellow ought to read." He paused. "O, I'll make a man of myself yet, Linda. I must do it. I *will* do it." His face was eager, his voice trembling with emotion. There was a moment's quiet as they stood there with the solemn night enwrapping them

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and the calm moonlight lending a sense of awe and mystery to the great mountains about them. He held out his hand. "Many a time in these months I've looked at this right hand—it don't look like a gentleman's, does it?—and thanked God for the strength that's in it. And when I had done my best on my books I have thanked God for giving me brain enough to put my strength to some use. . . . Linda, Linda, haven't you got a word for me?"

The girl's voice was low: "Forgive me, Harry, if I am doing you a wrong. I can't tell you how I've troubled about—about what I said to you. Sometimes I've felt that it would be all right; that you would go on and make a fine man—as I believe you will—and that I would finally care for you as you deserve. Then again I would doubt myself and would make up my mind to stop it all. What if I should let things stand this way for a long time, and then be compelled to send you away?" She paused as if for an answer. At length the low, gentle voice went on again: "Don't you know you'd have a right to blame me then?"

"Is there—is there—anybody else?"

For an instant there rose before the girl's mental vision a manly figure and a face whereon was written the record and promise of a noble life, but the vision was swiftly put aside. "No; there's no one else, Harry."

"Then I'm willing to wait, and I won't blame you if I have to give you up. Let me work on with hope before me, Linda."

"I'm afraid of myself, Harry. There's a line of poetry that rings through my ears like a chime of bells, I reckon—'I will build me a nest on the greatness of God.' When I think of that I want to be true

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and honest all the way through; then I'm afraid to be treating you this way."

"But I'm willing to take the chances. Don't shut me out yet, Linda. You do care a little for me, or you wouldn't have let me have ground to stand on."

"O, I don't know, Harry. I don't know what is in my nature. There are two separate selves, and I envy my friend, Fannie. She never seems to be in doubt, but goes ahead doing exactly the right thing without seeming to think about it, while I 'doubt, delay, and dodder,' as she says."

"I'm willin' for you to doubt a little longer if you'll just give me a fightin' chance, an' I'll try not to be too foolish. Father says for me to take care and not be a fool for the want of sense, as that's the very worst sort." He looked quizzically at her, and both smiled. The situation was cleared, and again the buoyancy of youth and hope filled the lad's soul. Before him lay the world and its possibilities; while by his side, smiling kindly on him, was the girl whose charm had been his guiding star while he worked toward higher things.

CHAPTER VII.

AT EAGLE'S NEST.

As the carriage wound slowly up the mountain side, Linda fell silent. She watched the panorama—the sweep of far-stretching peaks, Platt's Balsam standing out boldly against the softened background of misty mountains, the valley through which the railway wound, a sinuous thread, while the train seemed a Lilliputian object moving meekly through this wide-spread grandeur.

"Is it wonderful to you, Linda?"

"Yes; O, yes!"

"I never tire of this drive, but it is a pleasure to me to look at it through young eyes. You have a very tell-tale face, Linda, and I could see you are enjoying it."

"I thought of a line of Milton's where he speaks of 'hill and dale, for earth hath this diversity from heaven.'"

"You like books; are you willing to give up regular school work, as I had planned if you came to me? Of course I know you agreed to do so, but wouldn't you prefer school?"

"If I please you and can do all you wish me to do and at the same time can have tutoring, I believe that would be better for me. I love Brevard and am sorry to give up the school, but I thought that travel and the use of books might do me as much good as

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text-book training. Mrs. Eccles advised me to accept your offer. She has been so good to me. I have found such friends, anyway. I don't know why, but people are ready to be kind."

"You have much in your favor. There's the attraction of youth in the first place, and your good looks, of course. You must know that you are more than ordinarily good-looking, my dear. I have all a French-woman's weakness for beauty, and I'll own that if you had been an ugly girl I would not have been attracted so promptly. Mind you, one has to have other qualities to hold the interest or affection of people, though. You've learned that, and I hope you will not find me so worldly as to teach you that too much depends on your looks. There, there! no offense was intended. I like you very much in that suit. It requires an absolutely perfect complexion to wear that shade of gray. What have you for evening wear, Linda?"

"Only my white dresses. They are rather plain, but I like them best that way."

"That is safe. It's better for a young girl to dress simply, but—we shall see," and Mrs. De Jarnette lost sight of her loved scenery as she gazed dreamily out, seeing a slender girl dressed elegantly and with exquisite taste.

Eagle's Nest draws to itself many wealthy pleasure or health seekers from the Southern cities. Mrs. De Jarnette was sure of finding friends or old acquaintances who, like herself, had learned to love the mountain eyrie. After the guests had gathered in the spacious parlors just before the evening meal, Mrs. De Jarnette's entrance was greeted by a delighted chorus: "*Dcar* Mrs. De Jarnette, we are so happy to see you! so happy!" "We were quite in despair when you

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failed to come on the morning hack." "O, we were so disappointed!" "Indeed we were!" And the ladies closed around the two newcomers.

"I am delighted to be back in the Nest, and to meet you all again. Mrs. Eubanks, Mrs. Holt, Miss Morning, Miss Dupont—ah, a fine delegation from Savannah! Are you just from the city? I've been away so long, you know. Allow me: this is a young friend of mine who is to be with me this summer, ladies, Miss Graham."

Linda met the ordeal with composure. If there was not about her the perfect ease, the *savoir-faire*, of the society woman, there was none of the obtrusive awkwardness that one might expect from a backwoods girl.

When the ladies were seated again, Linda found that she had been separated from Mrs. De Jarnette and was nearest to Mrs. Eubanks, a portly dowager dressed in an immense quantity of black satin. The air of opulent sleekness, the sheen of her rustling skirt, the glitter of jet, the gleam of her bediamonded hand all conspired to humble her neighbor and make her feel particularly slim and poor and meekly clad.

Linda smiled inwardly. She bethought herself of a description her friend, Fannie, had given of an evening with a certain chaperone: "I saw it was to be the Fourth all over again. If I allowed her, she would squelch me within the hour; and I resolved that no British-looking gorgon should conquer me without a struggle. It was dreadful, but she will never attempt to subdue me again. She simply lets me alone!"

"Miss Graham, if I caught your name rightly?"

"Yes; Linda Graham."

"The Augusta Grahams?"

"I am a North Carolinian."

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"I see. You must belong to the Cape Fear branch of the Grahams—fine people they are."

"I am from western North Carolina, and have no relations that I know of in the Cape Fear section."

"Ah!" The word was full of meaning.

Linda inferred that she must stand and deliver. If not to the Augusta branch or to the Cape Fear branch, in the name of genealogical decency, to what branch did she belong? "My father died when I was quite small, and I know nothing of his people."

"Yes, yes," and Mrs. Eubanks invited further confidence. She settled her skirts with a splendid sweep, sank back in her chair, and began waving her fan with an impressive motion. Mrs. Eubanks was always imposing. When she began to speak, one felt that here was wisdom or what passes as its equivalent—the spirit that announces: "When we die, wisdom will die with us." Suddenly she sat erect with an air of awakened vivacity. "Ah, Telfair Ledroux! I didn't know he was expected."

Two gentlemen had come in and were standing near the big fireplace. The taller of the two was dark, slender, distinguished-looking. When he caught sight of the Savannah delegation, he came across the room toward them. Linda supposed that he must be a person of consideration, if one might judge from the flutter his appearance excited. He greeted the ladies of the group pleasantly, and turned to the young stranger when Mrs. De Jarnette called her name. Linda looked up into his face. His eyes were dark and penetrating. She had never seen a more handsome man.

When the music of the Italian band struck up with the swing of a lively waltz, Linda felt as if in a dream world. The brilliancy of light and color, the ele-

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gantly dressed women, the subdued sound of well-bred voices, the beauty, the very fulness of life stirred the depths of her soul. She felt one instant that all this was for her—that some deep, inward strain of blood coming down to her from a far-off, beauty-loving ancestor made this richness hers. Another moment and she felt herself an alien. Her mind went back to the poor home which had sheltered her so long. Instead of the high-bred people about her she saw the crude, unlettered folk with their defective English, their slovenly dress, and their slow-moving processes of thought. A sense of shame swept over her—shame that she should be ashamed, shame because she inwardly claimed superiority over those whom she ought to love. How shallow must her nature be when she was so ready to turn from the old life, to break the old ties, to neglect the one true soul that was fighting its way up the hill of difficulty for her sake! In imagination she set her lover among these men and women. She contrasted his simple speech with their polished language, his unformed manner with their ease and self-possession.

“Linda, I’ve been telling Mr. Ledroux of you and of my plan. Come here, my dear.” Mrs. De Jarnette’s companion drew a chair near the elder lady and handed Linda to it while he stood looking down on the two during a brief but animated conversation.

Mrs. De Jarnette was planning a Southern trip for herself and Linda which should embrace the Mardi Gras at New Orleans, and Mr. Ledroux was giving her a deal of first-hand information. “It’s well worth seeing, Mrs. De Jarnette, and I only wonder that you’ve never been in the city at that time. We Southerners are becoming too much like our New England friends. We are taking life too seriously. It’s good

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to pause and watch this big holiday and remind ourselves that there is something to live for besides making money or reforming the world."

"Ah, there you are again with that skepticism of yours? Do you know, Linda, Mr. Ledroux claims that we ladies are all playing at being good when we go 'slumming' or when we take up serious matters in our clubs. He seems to think that we never really mean these things."

"Mrs. De Jarnette never pretends anything, Miss Graham. She is always in earnest, even when playing whist."

"And that reminds me; do you know the game, Linda?"

"I don't know anything of cards."

"We will teach you this very evening, Miss Graham. You remember Mrs. Battle in Lamb's delightful essay? It was her business in life to play whist. Mrs. De Jarnette is another such devotee of the old game."

"Yes, indeed! Give me a 'clear fire, a clean hearth, and the rigor of the game'; but I have no patience with the modern bridge and the spirit of gambling that drives out all the friendliness of play."

After the supper was over the party of guests fell into groups to amuse themselves as each liked best. With an elderly gentleman as fourth, Linda was soon being initiated into the mysteries of whist. Opposite her and watching her with keen interest was Mr. Ledroux, her partner for the evening. And as he watched the young girl there came to him a breath of that fragrant youth of his wherein faith in womanly purity and worshipful reverence for woman's nobility had been as life to him. The years slipped away from this blasé man of the world, and again for the moment he stood at life's threshold full of hope and

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kindly affection and love of truth and all true things. Looking into the girl's clear eyes, life once more held out a promise of higher and worthier things. When they were breaking up for the night, he made opportunity to say to Linda, unheard of others: "Thank you, Miss Graham, for this evening. I have not had such a pleasant one in many a long day."

She looked into his eyes and knew that he spoke truth. Late she fell asleep with her young heart deeply stirred, and for the first night since Mrs. Eccles had repeated the line she forgot the words which had served to wing her thoughts heavenward: "I will build me a nest on the greatness of God."

CHAPTER VIII.

A RIFT IN THE LUTE.

Companionship with this man stirred Linda's brain to unwonted activity. The knowledge of the world that he possessed, his acquaintance with literature, his brilliant intellect gave charm and color to his conversation. He had traveled in the old countries; and to the school-girl his familiar talk of Ayrshire and of Abbotsford, the Alps, the Rhine gave a glamour of romance to the days as they swiftly passed.

There were long talks on the wide porches while the misty moonlight touched mountain and valley with solemn beauty. There were long walks in the woods while the afternoon sun shone glimmeringly through the leafage. And always for Linda there was the stir of her intellect awakening to a wider world, while for the man was the renewing of a half-dead spiritual nature. Without any conscious effort on his part, the cynic view began to soften. His talk took on a more earnest note. He wished to stand well in those young eyes that looked out on life in trustful innocence. It was worth something to him to feel that the young girl was drawn to him without any thought of the material advantages which had caused so many women to throw themselves in his way and to try every allurements to win him.

Mrs. De Jarnette looked on in silence. If she was aware that Mr. Ledroux was marking her protégé

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by any special attention, she gave no sign. Meanwhile she was keenly alert. She liked the son of her old-time friend, and yet—he must be careful. She would allow no trifling. She realized how delicate the situation was. A wrong word, and Linda might be driven from her with a wounded spirit. A tactless move, and Ledroux might turn that quiet scorn of his, that ready cynicism against her weak defenses. She must wait and watch till the right moment.

One afternoon Linda read Mrs. De Jarnette to sleep, softened the light for her, then took a new magazine and sought one of her resorts—a hammock at a corner of the veranda overlooking the Richland Valley. It was the usual rest hour for the ladies of the hotel, and she was not likely to have any interruption. She lay resting for a few moments, her arm thrown above her head and her eyes looking out along the wide sweep of the valley. She was thinking, thinking—always of the one man. His dominant power asserted itself in absence. What must she do? To crowd him back she opened the magazine, but the leaves fell apart just where his hand had rested that morning. He had cut the leaves for her, and, glancing along its pages, had read two or three lines of verse, then turned on with a half-contemptuous remark about present-day poetry. She found the verse and read:

“TWO LOVES.

“A storm-driven flower falls torn at her feet,
A flower blood-red, by torrid suns burned.
The maiden bends not—ah! loving is sweet,
But woe to the love that is spurned!

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"A wind-blown flower falls light at her feet,
A flower cool-white, by heaven's airs fanned.
The maiden bends low—two flowers that meet,
A rose and a lily-like hand."

She saw nothing in the lines to arouse the scoffing spirit; and again, as many times before, she determined to overcome the feeling—this fascination that held in bond the highest and best of her nature. Girl as she was, and untutored in the world's ways, she knew that something true within her was rebelling against this man's power. Finally, as she lay with her face turned toward the mountains, a great peace came over her; the dear and oft-repeated line soothed her as of old, the thought of her boy lover stirred her better nature to high appreciation, and in such mood sleep fell upon her.

A little later a light step sounded along the veranda and Telfair Ledroux stood looking down on the sleeping girl. The magazine lay open at the bit of verse, and he read the lines again. Gently dropping a flower in Linda's lap and taking one long look at the beauty of her, he turned and left the porch. As he struck into the woods on the mountain side, he looked himself in the face and questioned his heart. Almost he cursed the conventions that allow a man to waste the innocence and moral health of his youth and still be sought after as something worthy to be won. He had looked into the eyes of women who knew his record, and, finding no condemnation there, had learned to value lightly the smiles of all women. But now—ah, if he could stand before this white-souled girl and feel himself worthy of her love, the world might go its way! What matter to him that she was poor and of lowly origin? He could lift

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her to his own social level—he could, but did he wish to?

Linda's first sensation on awakening was one of indescribable pleasure. The flower that lay in her lap had its message. During their walks he had shown her this flower and that, giving her interesting bits of information about them. Lately they had spoken of a certain orchid. This must be the one. She could not be indifferent to his delicately shown thought of her. O, surely he was good and true and noble! She at least had the right to value his friendship. It was vanity in her that took warning and fancied anything else. As she lay there, with the flower in her hand, the sound of low voices forced itself into her consciousness.

"There is no mistaking the fact. He is foolishly, absurdly in love with her, and I can't imagine what the outcome will be."

"I don't understand it. How can a man of his social position do such an *outré* thing? We know there is no bluer blood in the South than Telfair Ledroux has, and the women of his family have always been so fine, so beautiful in manner."

Linda recognized the voice of Mrs. Eubanks.

"O, as to that, I think the girl has really nice manners. She certainly is bright and has a good deal of self-possession."

"You mean mountain brass." Mrs. Eubanks spoke in a way that suggested personal spite.

"I don't agree with you. I think the girl is a lady; and it would be a pity for her to waste herself, her youth, and her innocence on such a man as Telfair Ledroux."

In Linda's soul a storm was raging. They were speaking of her—the "mountain brass" fixed that be-

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yond a doubt. The cruelty of it! that she should be so hardly dealt with because she could stand squarely with her fellow-beings in the belief that inward strength counts for more than outer circumstances! The deep-seated pride of the mountain character pricked her to the core. With no effort at silence she gathered her belongings and left the corner of the veranda. No dame of the Ledroux race could have passed with a more queenly air than this young girl as she swept by the open window near which the two ladies sat.

"Ah!" And Miss Moring looked at Mrs. Eubanks with a quizzical smile.

"Dear me! I didn't mean—this is most unfortunate!" murmured the dowager.

After this, Linda's manner toward Mrs. Eubanks was noticeable for its ultra politeness. The older lady was nonplused. She could not apologize. The subject seemed a closed one. At times she made effort to overcome this barrier that stood between the girl and herself, and it was with inward wrath that she saw how slight an impression her own unbending made. Even if Mrs. Eubanks failed to realize the fact that real ladyhood is that fine essence which emanates from a woman's spirit, she was all the more anxious to hold to the outward act, and she felt ashamed because a careless moment had betrayed her into inexcusable rudeness of speech.

Unconsciously Linda threw into her intercourse with Mr. Ledroux a new touch of dignity—almost of hauteur, it seemed to the man—but as the girl withdrew herself from him he followed. Just when matters were at this stage, a letter from Fannie Everett came, announcing the fact that she and her uncle, Dr. Montague, would follow soon for a few days'

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visit, especially for the sake of being with Linda again before Fannie's school year should open.

"All the world loves a lover," and he is a rare person who will not turn aside to watch the byplay that goes on where the world-old story is being told. The arrival of Linda's two friends caused a stir of interest in the hotel.

"It's better than a good play on the boards," drawled a Freshman who was out for his first trip. "Stage-setting is all that's needed. Enter leading lady, gentleman madly in love. Things run smoothly, then friction, lady offish, queenly air, and all that. Enter second lover, psychological moment. Jealous lover precipitates things. Don't you see?"

"You don't suppose Miss Graham is capable of planning a thing like this, Mr. Burrell. O, no, she is too young, too much of an ingénue," Mrs. Eubanks spoke with marked emphasis.

"Miss Graham plan? I never thought of such a thing," and the young fellow forgot to drawl. "She seems to me the proudest girl I ever saw. I don't believe there's a man living she'd lift a finger to bring to her. She doesn't have to plan. The Lord did all that eighteen or twenty years ago."

"I don't think there's any symptom of a love affair between Dr. Montague and Miss Graham. Miss Everett is devoted to her friend, and naturally the whole family would be interested in the young lady." The speaker was one of those happily constituted women whose very voice serves as a lubricant for social machinery.

"Well, I don't know so much about that, but I do know your handsome Georgian seems hard hit. A man can't blame him. What a beauty she is, and she has sense besides!"

In the Nantahalas

"How interesting! A triple rivalry, is it?" Mrs. Eubanks waved her fan with calm dignity.

"You don't think a youngster like myself could stand a ghost of a chance when such a man as Ledroux is concerned? He and Miss Graham make the handsomest couple I ever saw."

The two girls were together constantly. Fannie had only a few days to spend with her friend, and they were making much of the time. Mrs. De Jarnette insisted that she could take absolute care of herself during the girl's visit, and this left Linda free. They had not been together long before Fannie discerned that her friend was undergoing some kind of strain. Beneath the bright, loving talk there was an under-current that broke the perfect sympathy of their intercourse.

Long ago Linda had told Fannie of the half-promise she had given her boy lover, but the matter had been little discussed between them. The older girl's natural reticence was not broken into by any show of curiosity on the part of her sympathetic friend. During the days in the Nest Linda had mentioned the matter only by saying that Harry was planning a year at the university.

One morning the two wandered down the mountain side and stopped to rest at a spring that flows from underneath a splendid growth of trees. Here they sat long, resting and talking. The lonely girl, orphaned, homeless except for the charity of one poor relative, felt that she must open her heart to this dear friend. And yet she knew not how to confide in her. Many things disturbed her young heart. Somehow the outer world did not seem so bright as from the little farm-house back in the Nantahalas.

Finally there came a moment of silence between the

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girls. Fannie laid her hand gently on her friend's: "Linda, Linda, something troubles you. Can I help you, dear? You know how I love you."

Linda lifted the girl's hand and kissed it. "I have wanted to talk to you, but it is hard. There's so much and I can say so little. I cannot put it into words."

Fannie waited. "Is it Harry?" at length she said.

"Yes, Harry, and—and—O, I can't talk of these things."

"There, there, darling! You needn't say a word. You know I love you with all my heart, and I sympathize with you whatever the trouble is."

"I'd like to tell you—much, but——"

"Would it be impertinent for me to ask if Mr. Ledroux has anything to do with your trouble? You know I have been hearing the gossip of the hotel, and they say he seems very much in love with you."

"I don't think so. Perhaps I am something of a novelty to him with my country ways and ignorance of his world."

"You shall not talk that way, dear girl. Any man ought to love you; but, Linda, I don't like him. He is quite the handsomest man I ever saw, and his talk is charming, but there's something—I don't know what—that repels me. You know the old lines:

" 'I do not like you, Dr. Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell,
But this I know full well:
I do not like you, Dr. Fell.' "

"Yes—yes," Linda caught a quick breath. "But do you see the hack? There in the bend of the road?"

"Yes, what of it?"

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"I believe—O, Fannie, it must be Harry! I never guessed he'd come—here."

The driveway passes by the spring. The girls were clearly visible to the occupants of the hack, and as it came nearer a young man sprang out, and in a moment was shaking hands with Linda. "This is my friend Fannie Everett, Harry. You will be good friends, I am sure."

"I'm on my way to the university, and found that I could come up for a few hours without putting things out. I couldn't resist the temptation," he looked a little wistfully at Linda.

"The trip up from town is well worth making," volunteered Fannie.

The walk from the spring was made pleasant by friendly talk. The young man had hesitated to set himself in comparison with the city-bred people of the hotel, but as self-reliance and manliness had grown apace in his nature he had realized that success would be his if he could but take hold of things with an iron grip. To win Linda he must show himself every inch a man, and who but a weakling would be kept from the sight of his loved one by the cowardly fear that he might appear awkward or country-bred? He was going into debt for a part of the year's schooling, but the old father on the farm had denied himself of certain needed things in order that the boy should have his chance. Thus Harry was not going in any mendicant style or spirit.

On the crest of Junaluska, just before you reach the hotel, there's a bit of greensward with trees flanking it, and underneath these rustic seats had been placed. Here one might rest and look out on the far sweep of mountains, peak after peak, with the

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valley lying between, and imagine the spot a fit trysting place for beauty-loving lovers of old Greece.

"Let us rest here awhile, shall we not?" asked Fannie, and in a few moments made excuse and left the two.

Harry turned to Linda, and all his soul shone through his honest eyes. "Have I done wrong, a foolish thing, in coming, Linda?"

"O, no, Harry." Inwardly she felt a wave of repulsion against herself. She looked at his strong, sun-tanned face with its square jaw and firm mouth, and marveled that she could so often doubt herself where Harry was concerned. Here was the promise of a real and potent manhood, here was the steadfast loyalty of an earnest and sincere nature, one ready to keep step with her in every effort to live a life of truth, of right-doing, of God-serving. And her heart was being tossed this way and that because a pair of dark and brilliant eyes had looked love at her, because an eloquent tongue had charmed her quickened brain, because a worldly man, all body and intellect, had singled her out among other women for passing notice.

"I am glad you came."

He looked into her tender eyes and his heart beat with proud, tumultuous joy.

CHAPTER IX.

MISS MCGREGOR, GENEALOGIST.

As the season waned a new arrival became an object of special interest to the guests in Eagle's Nest. One afternoon in late August the hack brought in a lady who wrote boldly across the register: "Miss McGregor, Genealogist." Later the clerk commented on it to the group of men gathered near the big fireplace.

"I suppose we are the greatest race of snobs on the face of the earth," remarked one of the gentlemen.

"But isn't this craze for family a passing mood in our democracy? After the Daughters and Dames get things adjusted, I guess we'll settle down quietly."

"Not while there's a Scotchman alive or a Southerner left to tell the tale."

The listeners smiled.

"We ought to get Mrs. Eubanks and the genealogist together; the result might be interesting," suggested the first speaker.

Miss McGregor proved expansive. That evening a company of ladies gathered in front of the blazing fire which is so necessary to the comfort of the Southern guests who are unaccustomed to the chill of the mountain night.

"I would think your work is very interesting, Miss McGregor." The dowager's deep voice filled the parlor.

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"It is fascinating, Mrs. Eubanks. When it became necessary for me to make my living, I cast about some time before thinking of this. I consider it a lucky hit that my mind was turned to the work."

"And are you a native of Baltimore?"

"O, no! I am a Carolinian, but found it necessary to live in a large city, where I could have access to fuller records. Baltimore has proved a happy hunting ground." The genealogist beamed on her listeners.

"Your patrons are—from what class largely?"

"The D. A. R.'s have brought me in some fine cases. Of course the different organizations among the women of America have furnished patrons, but you would be surprised at the number of men who are searching for a coat of arms."

"I thought it was the ladies who care for that sort of thing," ventured one of the guests.

"Ah, don't deceive yourself! You know the peasant Carlyle claims that back of every great man there's another great man, even though it be a silent one; and I assure you that my most generous fees have been from men—the new rich, who found some ancestor of whom they could be proud."

Just at this point two ladies came in and drew within the radius of the group.

"Mrs. De Jarnette, Miss Graham, Miss McGregor," volunteered a lady.

The genealogist responded pleasantly, then turned to the young lady: "Miss Graham? A fine Scotch name."

Linda bowed slightly.

"I am Scotch, you know, and, like Rob Roy, am on my native heath when the genealogy of a clan is under discussion. Are you a native of this State?"

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"Yes, a native of western Carolina. I know little of my genealogy," the girl answered with a quiet dignity.

"I assure you it's a fine name, my dear young lady. Much of the poetry and romance of 'Auld Scotia' clusters round the name of Graham; and in America, as I have learned by close inquiry, the clan has held its own. I congratulate you on belonging to it."

"If I have read Scotch history aright, the Grahams could be very cruel," answered Linda.

"Cruel, but never weak; and the cruelty was a result of the times, not so much a matter of temperament, I dare say."

"I can hardly understand the clannishness of the Scotch nature."

"It arose at first from the fact that each family had to fight for its own existence; then later it became a second nature. But whatever the cause, this clannishness, this pride of birth has been a great factor in the making of the Scotch. It has stood them in good stead through many a strain. You know the lines:

"Our bootless host of high-born beggars,
Macleans, Mackenzies, and Macgregors."

We do not bend to the power of money."

The next morning Linda was at her favorite corner on the veranda when Miss McGregor came and sat down beside her. "Miss Graham, will you think me impertinent if I ask you a few questions touching your father's family? You know that's in my line of business." Miss McGregor spoke apologetically.

Linda looked her full in the face. In the girl's

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deep eyes was proud questioning. She seemed to be searching the depths of the woman's soul.

"It is not idle curiosity," Miss McGregor answered the look. "I have had occasion to inquire into the Grahams of the South, and I have a special reason for my interest."

"I do not remember my father or mother. My aunt has told me very little. I think she never knew my father's family, and my mother died at my birth."

"Is there no one to whom I could write? Do you object to giving me your aunt's address?"

"My aunt is not accustomed to letter writing. She may not feel free to write to a stranger."

"There may be something in the matter important enough to convince both of you. Let me try her."

For some time there had rested over Linda's heart a sickening shadow—a fear that made her draw back from any inquiries about her father. Her aunt was naturally reticent, and seldom mentioned the girl's mother. Once in childhood Linda had asked some question that brought a look from her aunt more expressive than words could have been. The sensitive child never repeated the attempt to enter her mother's past, and as the years went by there had grown up the fear that some shame belonged to that past.

She longed yet dreaded to know. If this woman could bring light and cheer into that dark corner of her soul, how thankful, how deeply grateful she would be! And yet good men and women had borne the shame before. How could she reconcile this proud soreness with her belief that character is the golden test? "I will build me a nest on the greatness of God," not on the blood of father or mother. But if— Ah, there could be no wrong in referring Miss

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McGregor to her aunt; and she gave the desired address.

A week later the genealogist came to Linda's bedroom door. There was about her an air of suppressed excitement as she asked Linda to follow her.

In Miss McGregor's room the bed was strewn with papers. The genealogist turned them about, talking rapidly the while: "Since speaking to you I have had this matter sent me from home. Moreover, I've been busy getting material from other sources. Here is a letter from your aunt, in which she tells me of your mother's marriage. Let me read."

In simple, direct words the writer told of her sister's going to Atlanta as waitress in a boarding house kept by a lady who had met the young girl during a summer spent in western North Carolina. Her sister had come home sick, heart-broken; had lived only a few months, dying at her baby's birth. "I know my sister told me the truth. She had been married; but it all sounded like it couldn't be so, an' I never did tell folks. If it's any good to Lindy, I don't mind writing it, though. Her husband was in a school studying to be a dentist, an' they were married in secret. Then John Graham was taken sick all at once, an' when they telegraphed to his father the boy was raving and never did know anything more. Mary went to the other Mr. Graham an' told him about their bein' married, but he got mad an' wouldn't believe a word, and there was no way of proving it. The preacher that married them in South Carolina had gone out o' the country, and she didn't know how to do, anyway, and so she come home to me. I did the best I could for her, but it was not much. She died with her heart broken. Somehow Lindy got the no-

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tion in her head that her father died when she was a baby, and I didn't have the face to tell her it was before she was born. I knew so little and could prove nothing, so I just let it go and did not talk about it."

"Now here, Miss Graham, is a family record of the Georgia Grahams showing a break at the name of James Graham's oldest son. Last year I had occasion to visit Augusta in the interest of a Graham client, and there met the man who, I take it, is your grandfather." There was silence for a space. "Do you grasp that, Miss Graham? I have a letter here from the gentleman, now an old man, in which he says that he would be glad to find it true that his son left a child."

"How can I reconcile that with the treatment he gave my mother? I refuse to believe in him—in his goodness."

"But, my dear young lady, you must yield something to the father's pride. It must have been a blow to him to have his son accused of doing a treacherous thing, deceiving him in so vital a matter. Perhaps the father had high ambitions for him. The Grahams usually stand at the very front, remember."

"He must be cruel. I can't see it any other way. And my mother so young and ignorant of the world! I could not bear to meet him, even if he should prove to be my grandfather." There was nothing melodramatic about the girl's manner—only a quiet, self-restrained forcefulness that carried conviction with it.

"You know what this might mean to you? He is very wealthy, an aristocrat of the aristocrats. Your whole life would be affected by this fact. If I am

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mistaken, of course outsiders need know nothing of these researches; if I am right, you will share in Mr. Graham's fortune, no doubt."

Linda's mind had gone swiftly back through the shadowed years. "If it will clear my mother's memory, I agree for you to push the matter, for this reason only, I assure you; and I do not want him to think that I am giving my sanction to your plans. There shall be no pretense of affection. What do I owe him? I tell you, there are things more cruel than death."

The genealogist looked at the girl, whose face had whitened under the stress of feeling. "I admire your spirit, Miss Linda. One could hardly blame you if you should never forgive him, but you owe it to your own good name to clear up the shadow on your mother's past."

CHAPTER X.

THE CUP OF PLEASURE.

Much of the autumn was spent flitting among the Carolina mountains. During the cool days of September the Eagle's Nest was abandoned, and Mrs. De Jarnette with her young companion journeyed leisurely from point to point in the "land of the sky." The last of October found them at home in Savannah.

When moments of introspection had come Linda was restless and unhappy. Half consciously she had been going through struggles that were changing the very warp and woof of her character. At times she looked into her heart with the feeling that a stranger had taken up abode there.

In that simple farmhouse which had been her only home there had been little of what is called good breeding. There was antiquated English, there were crude manners. Looking back on the bare life, the cramped social surroundings, the meager intellectual sympathy, she believed that never again could she take up that life and find peace or joy in it.

At first there had been a sense of uneasiness as she joined in the dance and the game of cards. She soon learned to quiet her conscience by arguing within herself that the old life was one of narrowness—that a girl thus trained might feel a sense of wrongdoing from the mere novelty of the amusements. She saw that men and women brought up in that larger

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outside world thought of these things as matters of course. She succeeded in salving her spirit's wound by such fine words as "provincialism," yet always there was the tendency to avoid moments of inlooking, of rigid self-examination.

There had been evenings of gayety when the flushed cheek and sparkling eye spoke of unhealthy excitement. Later, when the quiet of her own room brought poise to her soul, she would look out upon the awe-inspiring mountains, swathed as they were in the moonlight's heavenly radiance, and a mighty yearning for divine things would lift her spirit into a purer atmosphere. At such times she would remember with a sickening sense of depression that first night away from home—that long-to-be-remembered night when the sweet voice of a noble woman had sung into her soul the music of Lanier's lines: "I will build me a nest on the greatness of God." How far afield had she gone since then! Was she building that nest wisely and well? Was this life best for her? Back of all the novelty and excitement was there a growth in character that tokened well for her future? Ah, it was all too complex! Why not "take the goods the gods provide" without this morbid quibbling, this unhappy self-questioning? Did not God mean that his children should be happy? The waves dance in merriment; flowers quiver as though alive with joy—

"Ten thousand saw I in a glance,
Ten thousand in one sprightly dance."

the birds of heaven sing in pure abandon of happiness. And shall one of his very own be miserable because she has dared to join in innocent pleasure? It is all wrong, this morbidness, this moody introspec-

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tion which is shutting off the sunlight for one who has had so little of sunlight in her life.

The Savannah home in which Linda found herself settled was in a residence quarter not too fashionable for gentility. The street was one of old homes, where old memories gave charm and distinction to the surroundings.

Within a few days after Mrs. De Jarnette's arrival the services of tutors were secured and Linda began a course of lessons calculated to supplement the teaching she had received in the schools. With her light duties as companion to Mrs. De Jarnette, her studies, and the social life naturally falling to her as friend of the older lady, Linda's time passed rapidly—happily, she told herself in her brighter moods. But always there was the spirit of unrest, of half satisfaction that served as an undercurrent through the ebb and flow of feeling. As she went deeper into the life of Mrs. De Jarnette and her set, she found many things that disturbed her and threw her mind back for a balancing point to that quiet time in the mountain solitudes, when, as she thought, her heart was eating itself out for want of action, of outlet. Now, in the thick of activity, with life surging about her, its mysteries stirring her soul, its high motives calling to her, its temptations beating against her, she began to see that the years of formation had lasted none too long.

She wanted to keep a clear vision, to see the real things, the worthy things about her; but there was confusion, often, instead of clarity as she looked upon the life around her. The game of cards which had caused her little uneasiness in its beginnings grew into large proportions in its bearing on her character. She found that her acquaintances were among

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the ladies whose round of social pleasures included card parties. The custom of giving prizes added zest to the game, but it was with a shock that she learned that many ladies in that set staked money. As she became more accustomed to these things her view of them changed—not in a few days, but slowly, as character processes always act.

Mrs. De Jarnette was a woman of consideration in the best social circles of the city, and many of the younger women who deferred to her were on guard in her presence. Linda found that the quiet games in her friend's home were conducted very differently from the card parties given by many others in the same social strata. There were elegant homes in which money was spent with reckless extravagance—homes wherein barriers were somehow broken down and ladies gave to themselves a freedom which in Mrs. De Jarnette's eyes would have seemed license.

At first Linda accepted invitations to these homes because the ladies were acquaintances of Mrs. De Jarnette, and perhaps the young girl felt flattered by the notice given her. Later she came to the point at which this glow of life, this swiftly moving procession was delightful to her. The first time wine was served at one of these card parties she refused the glass. Her nearest neighbor, a well-bred, beautifully dressed woman, leaned toward her: "Don't you care for wine, my dear? This is the finest Madeira."

"Yes, I like it; but I had not thought it quite right to drink it."

"Ah!" and the lady's brows were lightly lifted.

Linda was aware that she had said an *outré* thing, and a flush came to her face.

Among her friends in Brevard there had been a

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deep and sincere recognition of the fact that the great things of life bear on the question of right and wrong. Among these new friends there seemed to be a code forbidding discussion of anything on so high a plane. To amuse themselves for the passing hour, to drink of pleasure's cup unmindful that dregs might be below, appeared to be the chief aims of the younger set of women who composed the world in which Linda now found herself. Yet this grosser life was so hedged about with external beauty, so softened by a fine and easy grace of manner, a courteous consideration for others that the girl was deceived into believing that such life is the one really worth while; and as the weeks passed she found herself more and more ready to leave her books and quiet her thoughts and join the passing show.

One afternoon, at a card party given by a wealthy young matron of her acquaintance, there seemed to be a spirit of unusual excitement astir when Linda went in, accompanied by another young lady.

"We were just saying, Miss Graham, that we fear you girls will be shocked if Mrs. Herkener is in her gayest humor this afternoon."

"O, don't prejudice the young ladies! I think Mrs. Herkener is such fun, and she is certainly a warm-hearted woman."

"I admit that, but you know she doesn't draw the lines *very closely*."

Later a tall, elegantly dressed woman came in with a married lady whom Linda had met, though never in Mrs. De Jarnette's home. The whole room was visibly affected. Every one who had no acquaintance with Mrs. Herkener seemed to have heard of her.

Soon the game was made up, and Linda found herself at the same table with the late arrival.

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The playing was desultory at first. Mrs. Herkener talked a great deal in a soft, rich voice, and held the attention of those near her. Her home was in another State; but her young ladyhood had been spent in Savannah, and there was much discussion of the whilom members of their set.

"They tell me Nell Talbot has quit flirting. I didn't think it possible. She must have married a Tartar."

Then an oath fell lightly from her red lips. Linda looked in amazement at the woman, then at her listeners. The faces about her showed varying emotions. On some was absolute astonishment or disgust, on others open or half-concealed amusement.

"O, I beg pardon, Miss Graham! I see by your looks that you are not accustomed to vigorous terms. There was a time in my 'green and salad days' when these things jarred on me, but such innocence can't last."

Linda was mute. How could a woman of education, wide opportunities for culture so cheapen the fineness that belongs to woman nature?

Mrs. Herkener went on: "Now, my husband wishes me to have a good time. I don't believe it's possible for him to be jealous, and I am so glad. It is such fun to break in a lot of youngsters, doing the Platonian and all that, you know. Of course Dick's awfully busy, and it's tiresome to him to go about; so I really think he's grateful to the dear boys. By the way, Flora, you remember Tom Elson, of Tallahassee, the kid you met up in the mountains two years ago? He has grown to be the swellest young fellow. Two years of college life have brought him out wonderfully. Really, it almost makes me serious to hear him discourse about woman. He worships the eternal feminine, and just now he fancies I am the

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one—the onliest one. He is so splendid looking, in a demigod style, that I feel like it's almost worth while to be good in order to hold his worship. Another glass, please; I adore sherry."

Linda's face showed continued wonder.

"You blessed innocent!" the rich, musical voice flowed on. "You don't know what to think of me? Don't let your maiden dreams be disturbed. I am not altogether horrid. Life is an awful bore at times, and one must do something or go daft. I am not sly, and that constitutes the great difference between myself and many other ladies of my acquaintance. Sly, did I say? Let me correct that, for I've taken to cigarettes without Dick's knowing it. One simply must season the stale days with something, and Tom had just gone back to college." The beautiful eyes turned calmly from one to another and again rested on Linda's perturbed face. "My dear, you have trumped your partner's trick. Do I confuse you with my talk? Forgive me, and I'll be good." She grew quiet and bent her attention to the game, playing rapidly and with evident mastery of the cards.

Linda was fascinated by the woman's beauty and grace. Her white hands moved deftly, her soft, dark eyes shone, her ripe lips closed firmly as she grew more intent on the play.

For a while the game moved swiftly on. The faces of the other ladies grew more interested. Mrs. Herkener played as if her whole soul was staked on the result, and success came at her touch. No one in the game had such mastery of cards.

At last her luck turned, and Mrs. Herkener's face grew tense and white. She flashed her brilliant eyes as if taking in the whole sweep of the game. Evidently she was watching her opponents with suspicion.

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Linda's partner was a comparative stranger to the girl, and it was only by slow forcing that the truth was made plain to her. Mrs. Douglas, her partner, was trying to hold the game by surreptitious signs. To them Linda gave no heed, but played as if she saw nothing. Finally the woman put out her foot and touched Linda's lightly.

Mrs. Herkener leaned forward: "If this occurs again, I'll throw up my hand." The face was wide awake now, all the gambler's passion alive in it; the white hand gripped the cards till the muscles strained, the eyes gleamed unnaturally.

Mrs. Douglas looked at her. "If you care that much for cards, you'd better quit altogether. It's byplay to me. I was only in fun."

"You were trying to cheat, and it is a shame!"

"Ladies, ladies!" The hostess hurried to the table, and Linda rose from her place.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Lane, but won't you find another partner for Mrs. Douglas?"

"Pray keep your seat, Miss Graham; I am sure no harm was intended."

"I am sorry to seem rude, but I am more ashamed of my part in the game. Mrs. Herkener, allow me to thank you for opening my eyes to the folly and danger of cards."

As she stood by the table, her face aglow with excitement and indignation, Mrs. Herkener looked up at her: "You are right, girl. Give it up. I would fall down and thank God if it were possible for me to go back to my innocent girlhood and find some friend who would save my womanhood for me."

CHAPTER XI.

MOUNTAIN PRIDE.

For Linda there were days of exaltation after the events of the card party—days in which Lanier's line was to her one of the most vital things in life. She seemed to have cut loose from the influences that had been sweeping her onward. During this time she could not speak of these things to Mrs. De Jarnette. To put her thoughts into words would have seemed a desecration.

After a morning call from a friend Mrs. De Jarnette sent for Linda.

"Sit down, dear," the elder lady spoke kindly. "Mrs. Eubanks has been telling me of a little incident that occurred the other evening at Mrs. Lane's card party." She waited.

"Yes?" The name of Mrs. Eubanks stirred a feeling of resentment in Linda's heart. She was aware that the imposing dowager disapproved of her.

"Of course, Linda, I like for you to be conscientious, but is it not wise to guard against extremes?" Mrs. De Jarnette's manner was perfect, gentle, self-restrained, motherly.

Linda's face flushed hotly.

"Did Mrs. Eubanks tell you that the woman with whom I was playing used an oath, and that another one in the game tried to cheat?"

"O, my dear, don't use such plain terms. She did not say so much. I inferred that you disapproved of

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the game—for some reason, she did not specify—and that you were a little too impulsive in showing your disapproval.”

“In other words, that I made a scene? I have hesitated to speak of it to you, not because of any fear, but because the matter was one of such importance to me, I could not trust myself to talk calmly of it.”

“Won’t you give me your version of it, dear? I am aware that our social life is not so quiet and dignified as it used to be. We older people seem out-of-date, but in my girlhood we tried not to make ourselves conspicuous. I stand in the place of your mother, as well as your friend, and I feel that you should trust me entirely.”

With vivid words Linda pictured the evening to her, the beautiful woman with the charm of graceful manners, and an air of distinction, but with the poison of a tongue unscrupulous in its choice of words, and the spirit of one on fire with the passion of gambling.

“Ah, where will we stop? I believe, Linda, you have done right; you have not followed the traditions by which we have always lived, but there sometimes comes an hour when one must do a positive thing even if it is unconventional. It may prove a little awkward for us, for you and for me, but I shall not scold you. Now kiss me and run along.”

Thus encouraged, Linda felt that she could easily stand for all that she considered right and worthy, but as the days passed found herself again drawn this way and that. One victory does not always end a war.

The young ladies of her acquaintance seemed ill at ease when with her. They hardly knew where to place her. She had set herself apart by her conduct on the evening of the card party.

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Just at this point Telfair Ledroux returned to Savannah from an extended business trip. It was with a perturbed spirit that Linda thought of his coming into her life again. Separated from him she had succeeded in crowding him into the background of thought and emotion, but near him, with him, how would it be? She dare not let him get back his old ascendancy. Her letters to Harry and their answers had grown to have a profounder meaning for her. She saw through the terse lines the steady formation of manliness that was going on in the boy's nature. He never assumed too much. His letters were such as any sturdy friend might write to a girl who had helped and encouraged him to a larger life. He told her of his books, his teachers, his comrades. Finally a new note struck in and changed the tenor of his letters. One of the professors had been awfully good to him. "The fellows seem to wonder. They say he has never been known as anything but a machine for turning out math. work. I don't understand his liking me; but I reckon he does. We walk through the woods here sometimes, and I can't get out of my head for days the talk he has. You never heard anything like it—fine, fine, beauty there, and sweetness—but under it all and back of it all, a note of sadness. So sad, I can't tell you just how it impresses me."

In a later letter: "The fellows still guy me about old 'Math.', as they call him, and I love him. What a man he is! What a brain and heart. He seems to me to have sounded every depth of thought. He is not simply a math. machine. All knowledge appeals to him. He has the soul of a poet. Idealism, all the finer isms that are supposed to be foreign to the mathematical temperament, find sympathy in his nature. I

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can't imagine what gives him that undertone of sadness."

Linda saw that Harry was making rapid strides intellectually; perhaps his older friend had much to do with this. The girl herself had found there is no awakener of the intellect like contact with a rare personality.

Soon after Mr. Ledroux's arrival he came to the De Jarnette home in his usual informal way, as a friend of the family. He was ushered into the room where the ladies were sitting. After the customary greeting and interchange of light talk he turned to the young girl. "I'm glad, Miss Graham, to find you in our city, and I hope to have the pleasure of renewing the acquaintance so pleasantly begun at Eagle's Nest. I do not forget the evening we had our first game of whist. I trust we will have many more."

A silence fell. At last Mrs. De Jarnette remarked: "And thereby hangs a tale'. Linda has quit cards because of conscientious scruples."

"Ah! then we will resort to other pleasures," and he deftly turned the talk.

Somehow Linda felt a sense of narrowness in the presence of this cosmopolite. To have any struggle of conscience, any effort of prayer over so trivial a thing as a game of cards must look to Mr. Ledroux like spiritual childishness. She spurred her intellect to keep pace with him and to show that not always did she dwell in flats and shallows. Before the evening was over this man of intellect, of rare conversational power, had resumed his place in her spirit's stronghold and again the old fight with her higher self was renewed, the old restlessness revived, the old struggle for self-mastery was on.

The letters from Harry lost nothing in power. They

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registered a constant growth of heart and mind in the writer, but they became a source of trouble to Linda, stirring again the feeling that she was not acting sincerely with the young man.

While in this restless state one of Harry's letters added to her distress. "I have found out the secret of 'Math.'s' sadness. It all came out from the fact that I told him of you, of my great hope (mind, I said there was nothing sure), and in his sympathy for me he was led to tell me—much. I feel like I have gone through some fair temple, and have seen such wonderful sights, heard such heavenly sounds. Great God! The soul of a man like that is the final answer to skepticism. He was in love in his young manhood, and the woman failed him in a way that would make some men hate the whole world. Dear old Math. came out of it with a mighty grip on God, and the tenderest, most pitying love for the woman. As for the other man, he hated him and planned to kill him in the open, but Fate was ahead of him. The scoundrel sent for Math. while he was dying. The girl didn't live long. It was enough to melt a stone to see the sweetness, the spiritual beauty that shines like a star through such a cloud.

"I felt sorry that he had had no such woman as you to reverence."

To a fine soul there is no accusing so keen as over-praise. Linda gave herself no rest until she had answered Harry's letter. "You are placing me too high. If you lived close to me, if you could know my inward struggle, you'd find your mistake, perhaps to your own undoing and my unhappiness. Take me down from the pedestal. Think of me as a plain, everyday girl and not a heroine—a girl who wishes to wear the 'white flower of a blameless life' but

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finds it hard, very hard, to do the right thing under all circumstances.

"I have not been quite honest with you; maybe not with myself. You know of my uncertainty in regard to my feeling for you, Harry, but you may not know that I have simply been a coward of late—a coward who was sure what she ought to do but failed in courage because of fear that a true heart would be sorely wounded. You have grown into a manhood that will help you bear the disappointment, and you will see that it is unjust to you to hold you to an uncertain hope. You will yet see the day when you can think of me as a comrade struggling upward with you, a friend who loves you and rejoices in your growth. I am not going to say anything about matters being at an end between us. I expect to hear from you as usual. You will not think that I am indifferent and I shall feel proud to be allowed to watch the mountain boy as he takes his place, shoulder to shoulder, with men who are making ready to *do* things in this world.

"You asked me once if there was anyone else. I will be frank with you, even if it be at the expense of what you might think is perfect modesty. There *is* a man who is showing me more of my own nature than I have ever known. I cannot say that he loves me or that I love him though he has sought me—singled me out by attention when I would have preferred it otherwise; but he disturbs and distresses me by his influence over me. Can that be love? At any rate I can be honest with you—I must be so and simplify matters to that extent. If I do a wrong to myself I need not extend the wrongdoing to so true a friend."

Harry's answer was prompt and manly. He gave

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her back the shadow of a promise and begged that she feel no remorse for having allowed him to hope at all. It had been his own insistence and her kindness. If there was a man who could give her all the things she deserved and might never have as the wife of one who had to work his way up, he hoped she would feel free to care for that other.

Not long afterward came a letter from Fannie, who was in college in a North Carolina town. "I am indignant. For once in your life, Linda Graham, you've shown a lack of good, sound judgment. Harry Turner has the making of a man in him. Did he tell you he had seen me lately? A crowd of the 'Varsity boys were in town the other day (it must have been before you wrote him that letter). Their football team met a South Carolina one here and had to spend the night. In the evening some of the boys came up to see girls in the college. Among them was Harry, who asked for me. I like him. He isn't handsome, but he is improving *so* much, and his face is just the sort I like. A big mouth and a strong, determined look all over him—shoulders and head and everything. Of course we talked of you . . . And just to think! You must have set him adrift before the week was over. I'll bet that Mephistophelian Dr. Fell is at the bottom of it; and I, for one, don't approve. You are a bit older than I am, but you haven't seen so many people as your young friend. Don't trust that handsome man with the French name and high and mighty air. He completely squelches me. I wilt in his presence as promptly as an anemone in the air of a hot-house. (I like that and propose to use it in the 'Message'!) By the way, I must tell you of the literary honors being showered upon me. I am editor-in-chief of our college paper, 'The Mes-

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sage,' am appointed to write a play for the expression class to use at our mid-winter entertainment, besides which I am running a little private business with my gifted pen, to wit: One essay for Marion Reid, my room-mate, who bargains, in payment thereof, to make my bed and do sundry other household duties during the space of one month.

"Item 2. A short essay, weekly, for Maude Addington, who agrees to do my darning as payment.

"Item 3. Work as associate-editor of 'Message' for Isabel Willis, who agrees to embroider sundry center-pieces therefor, to be presented to my mother at Christmas.

"The expression teacher criticises my play, what I've written thus far, by saying it's too scrappy, that I quote too much and use trite phrases till it's patchworky. I talk just that way and I 'low to keep at it. It's a crime—literarily—to use any two words ever before put together in the same way, so I shall just take the bit in my mouth and use all the idioms and localisms and slang phrases and quotations that I please.

"But to hark back to your own affairs. Tell me—is it Dr. Fell?"

* * *

"Yes, your Dr. Fell *has* had something to do with it, but, if it will please you to hear it, I have refused to marry that same Dr. Fell.

"As to Harry: I see the good that is in him. I can stand by and watch his development with the pride that one comrade might have for another. It pleases me to see the mountain boy growing into the strong, self-reliant man whose brain is quickening by contact with new forces. I feel a glow as I realize how surely the power dormant in my people

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flowers into greatness. You speak of his manners. He is wonderfully quick to catch on to the little things that we girls notice. I saw the difference last summer. Part of it is due to the fact that his father is a gentleman by nature, if he *does* use 'holp' instead of helped, and if he *has* been brought up in a community where it is not considered 'bad form' for women to drop corn. Mrs. Turner says she has never heard her husband use what she called a 'vulgar word.' When I have had to listen to insinuations that came from fashionably dressed women who veiled their coarseness, I have thought of my own aunt, of Harry's father and mother, of others whose minds seem to me to square with their lives in being clean and upright.

"O, I know these things, but I cannot help this reaching out of my heart for the man who meets your disapproval. He masters me. When with him my whole nature is astir to please him. Away from him I doubt it all. I fear that his is not the best, the highest influence.

"I have refused to marry him because of my pride, perhaps. I would not want my husband to be ashamed of me or of my family. He is so far above me in intellect and in social position—what do I have to balance things? Nothing whatever, and I cannot bear to feel myself inferior at every point."

* * *

"My Dear Tragedy-Queen: You need me, beloved. I am back home for Christmas. (Will go to Marian's later for a few days before school opens.) You ought to be here to-night with a big, warm kimona on, your hair all down around your shoulders, a plate of mother's Christmas cake nearby, and your friend giving you the distilled wisdom of the ages as it per-

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colates through her brain. You are something of a problem with all your loveableness, and you do not quite know yourself.

"If you love that man, go on and marry him. I will be pushing no more ghosts into your banquet. Don't talk nonsense about inferiority. Of course he has brains, money, position, but you have what is infinitely superior—greatness of soul. I am sure he isn't worthy of you, but so much of a paradox am I, the thing I've feared I now desire because you wish it. Let me hear from you soon and tell me you are happy."

CHAPTER XII.

THE TIE OF BLOOD.

As the days passed it was clear to Mrs. De Jarnette that Ledroux was being drawn again to Linda. So strong are the conventions this woman of the world wondered if the man really intended to marry the girl, or was he simply whiling the time away because of her beauty and charm? There were hours when the woman-heart rose in rebellion against the sacrifice of youth and innocence. At such times Mrs. De Jarnette was tempted to warn Linda, to open Ledroux's unlovely past to her, and to break up the growing intimacy. But always the law of her world closed her lips. At last she decided to let matters drift. There seemed to be no harm in allowing Ledroux the freedom of a house which had always been open to him as the son of an intimate friend. If he chose to marry the girl there was no one to gainsay him. Save for one sister he stood alone in the world so far as close family ties were concerned. That sister's residence in a distant city precluded any serious interference on her part. If the past with its aristocratic tendencies, the memories of high-bred men and women, should not forbid his allying himself to a girl of the people, who would have any right to disapprove? To be sure the girl was all that an exacting man might ask, but back of this was the undeniable fact that she belonged to obscurity and poverty.

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Possibly there was not one of her family of whom she would not be ashamed in the old Ledroux home, where everything spoke of wealth and refinement.

In Mrs. De Jarnette's eyes Linda's manner was perfect. She accepted Ledroux's friendly attention with quiet dignity. There was no flutter, no embarrassed self-consciousness about her. Much of their association was in Mrs. De Jarnette's parlor where books were read and discussed, the two younger people taking the more active part. Ledroux's wide knowledge of the world, his travel and experience gave him the advantage of leadership, yet the woman listening often noticed that the girl's mind added color and distinction to the talk. Linda seemed intellectually fearless and never hesitated to differ from the man's view even when that view was backed by the authority of the ages. This very independence seemed to be a pleasure to Ledroux and led him into wide fields of argument, when he would close the book and draw Linda's eager mind along, deferring to her, or, with swift logic, driving her to woman's conclusive word, "It is, because it is."

One afternoon just before the Christmas holidays Linda was out when a caller inquired for her. The servant who announced the gentleman came back to Mrs. De Jarnette with the message that he was especially anxious to see the young lady. Would she be back soon?

Thinking it might be an old friend or some relative of the girl Mrs. De Jarnette had him invited to the parlor where she was sitting. The tall, old gentleman with the clear-cut features, the high-bred air, the courtly bow, could not belong to Linda's mountain home.

The two stood, for an instant, looking into each

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other's eyes, mentally gauging the man and woman lying below the protecting sheath that custom forms.

"My name is James Graham, madam. I did not send in my card because I thought it possible the very name might prejudice the family against me."

"James Graham? Of Augusta?"

"The same, madam."

"Be seated, sir. You wish to see Linda, my companion?"

"I *must* see her. There are imperative reasons——" He seemed about to go on, then paused.

"I am expecting her every moment. She is out for a short while only."

The man looked into the patrician face before him and recognized the fact that this lady belonged to his own world. She might be able to understand his motives, the influences that had molded him, had impelled his past and now constrained him at every step.

He motioned her to a seat and, drawing a chair near her, began:

"If you will allow me, I will tell you a little story, hoping, believing, that you will prove my ally when you hear me out."

"I suppose it is about Linda. I am all interest, for I love the girl, and feel that she's under my care in no ordinary sense."

"Certainly, and I believe your friendship for her will help to adjust matters." Then briefly he sketched the story of his son's illness in Atlanta, his own distress and disbelief when confronted by the young woman with her absurd claim. "Perhaps I was harsh. It was altogether unbelievable to me, that my boy, for whom I had such great hopes and plans, should so disappoint me. When she offered no proof except her own word, and had to acknowledge that

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she could not find the minister who married them, that letters to him had come back to her unopened, I believed that she was false, wholly bad, and was simply trying to extort money from me. However, when I asked her how much money she expected, the heart-breaking look on the girl's face *did* stir a doubt in my mind. If my boy had lived longer I would have tried harder to find her, but inquiries at the boarding-house, where she was a waitress, developed the fact that she had gone—no one knew where—presumably back to the mountains. Then my son's death somewhat crowded the matter out of my mind.

"Later, in the quiet of our home, weeks, then months, passed without any further word of her, until I became convinced that she was truly an adventuress, but one of a weak sort and had been frightened away by my attitude. You are aware of the manner in which the matter was brought to my mind again. Miss McGregor has been to Augusta lately. I have spared no pains to verify her belief that your friend is my son's daughter. After many disappointments we found the South Carolina minister who performed the marriage ceremony for the young people. He was traveling in Europe at the time the wife was trying to obtain proof of her marriage. I am sorry—with a great sorrow—and I stand ready to make every possible restitution."

Mrs. De Jarnette had listened sympathetically: "Linda is exceedingly proud."

"Yes, and resents my treatment of her mother. But surely she will listen to me. She will forgive."

"I hope so. I wish it. Understand, it would cost me a good deal to give her up. Her strength, her dependableness have become very necessary to me, and I love the girl for her fine qualities. Besides it

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is not improbable that she will marry one of the *partis* of the city. I feel sure the gentleman is very much in love with her, and now that her ancestry is proven to be desirable I see nothing in the way."

"Would it be any consideration if I propose to give her a dower?"

Mrs. De Jarnette smiled. "It might please the man, but I can imagine Linda's resenting such an offer. You will have to see her before you decide what method to pursue with her."

Their talk drifted away from the great topic into other channels. A common interest in the old South with its fine civilization, a recognition of the vital difference between yesterday and to-day, gave them matter for discussion. In the midst of their talk the door opened and a sweet, cheery voice broke upon them.

"But didn't I tarry? There were so many pretty things to look at. The city is full of Christmas already. O, I beg pardon. I didn't know you had company."

"Linda, come here, child. This is Mr. James Graham, of Augusta."

The girl caught her breath quickly. Mrs. De Jarnette took her hand and drew her gently forward.

Mr. Graham was on his feet. He moved a step nearer and held out his hand, while his eyes hungrily searched the beautiful face lifted to him.

The bright look faded from Linda's eyes. The lines of the whole face fell into statuesque coldness. Her hand touched lightly the one held out to her.

"Mr. Graham?" she spoke with cool self-possession, "an acquaintance of yours, Mrs. De Jarnette?"

The latter lady turned helplessly and looked at the gentleman.

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"What beauty! What an air," mentally exclaimed the old man.

"Linda," Mrs. De Jarnette spoke a little sharply; "you must know who this is, and I shall leave you to listen to him. Remember I expect you to be reasonable."

"Will you sit down and hear me?"

The girl seated herself.

He began his story in a quiet manner, but as he went on his emotion showed in gesture, in look, in pathetic tremor of voice. He told his tale much as Mrs. De Jarnette had heard, perhaps emphasizing less his high ambition for his son. He did not spare himself in telling of his meeting with Linda's mother. When he came to his offer of money the girl lifted her head quickly:

"O, my mother!"

"Yes, yes, it was a cruel thing to do. I am sorry—God only knows how sorry." After finishing the tale there was silence between them for a space.

Again the old man broke the stillness: "I am alone in the world, except for an invalid son who has lived in his chair for years. My wife long since died, my daughter died childless—I had thought—hoped—can you find it in your heart to come and live with an old man whose heart is nigh broken, whose life is lonely with the loneliness of age and bereavement?"

Linda's face softened. Its cold look changed to one of sympathy, but she felt no impulse of love, no tenderness that might prompt her to sacrifice herself for him. Her mind flew outward, fancying long days in his home with always the shadow of her wronged mother between them. He watched her keenly. The silence was again broken by the man:

"I see. It is too much to expect of you. At least

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you will allow me to make life easy for you with the money that would have been your father's?"

"If I cannot give you my life, myself, it seems wrong to use your money."

"I do not see it that way. It is really *your* money, and if you have no need for it yourself you might use a part for the benefit of your aunt's family. I believe she has several children."

"Yes."

"Then you do not refuse to allow me to send your aunt money? Remember she took care of my son's wife and child when there was no one else to do it."

"I have no right to refuse if she is willing to accept."

He bowed and moved toward the door. As he passed Linda noted the pathetic droop of the tall figure, the whiteness of the bent head. Of a sudden her pride fell away as a useless thing. The woman heart within her rose tumultuously. A quick step and she was by his side. The fountains were broken up. As he looked down in her face he saw the tears, the pity, the divine love shining there, and he gathered her to him, murmuring sweet, endearing words the while.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALL FOR LOVE.

After the reconciliation with her grandfather Linda could do no less than give to him a part of the Christmas time, reserving to herself the right to return to Mrs. De Jarnette when the New Year opened.

Her heart was deeply touched by the welcome given her in the stately home of her father. At first the loneliness of the house, the stillness pervading the spacious rooms, struck a chill to her sensitive nature, but as the old man led her to his invalid son and she looked down on the drawn figure, the white pain-lined face, the sense of isolation forsook her. The younger man's pathetic eyes looked searchingly into hers. All the woman in her nature responded, and she knelt by the chair smoothing the graying hair and murmuring gentle words of sympathy.

"O, my dear, my dear; you don't know how sweet it is to feel the touch of a woman's hand. Since my mother died there has been no woman to show love for me." The thin hands clasped hers and all the man's heart-hunger showed in his eager look and movement.

There were tears in the father's eyes as he watched the scene.

A little later as the young girl sat by the big chair talking brightly to the sick man he seemed to hang on every word and follow, with happy interest, every

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gesture, every change of expression in the beautiful face.

A while then her grandfather bade her come with him to her own room.

As they climbed the broad stairway there came over Linda that strange feeling which sometimes overpowers us with a sense of life's unreality. She seemed, in the depths of her consciousness, to be fully aware that somewhere, sometime, she had lived through this very scene, had passed along a magnificent hall and up a stairway into a beautifully appointed room with an old man by her side,—an old man whose pride had been broken, whose domineering spirit had been quieted by life's sorrows and who now offered her in humblest fashion, the best of himself, a love purified as by fire.

A warm fire brightened the hearth, soft lights showed the perfect taste of the room's fittings.

"The maid has done her part, but I preferred to help. This is your room. These are your belongings if you will accept them. Your grandmother used the room when she was a bride and to the day of her death.

"She believed I was too harsh in my dealings with your mother, so you need not hesitate to——if you could only feel at home here."

Linda laid her hand gently on the tremulous lips. "I thought the past was to be forgotten entirely. You shall not make yourself unhappy to-night, this Christmas Eve, and my first night in your home."

"Can't you think of it as *your* home, Linda? We need you so much; oh, so much."

"I have intended nothing else since I looked on Uncle Cam's face. If you want me you shall have me,"

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"God bless you, dear." He took her hands in his and, holding them tenderly, talked to her of his sorrows, his keen disappointments as he had slowly watched the death of all his ambitions. How he had rebelled at the early death of his boy. And when the younger began to show signs of physical decay a storm of doubt submerged all his being. He had seemed to be in the clutches of a loveless, most cruel, Fate. The spirit of the Covenanters rose fierce within him, not the spirit that chose death rather than yield an inch of one's hold on God, but the stubbornness that could bear without flinching. Far off seemed the God who took no loving care of suffering humanity.

"For years I have seemed to live absolutely without God. I thought the very name had lost its meaning for me. No minister has dared to talk to me of Him. Even Cameron has feared to mention such things, and I know he has tried to hide his suffering because the sight of it hardened me toward that Being who allows such misery.

"But of late somehow a change has forced its way through me, my heart, my conscience. I speak it reverently—I believe God has been drawing me to Him before that great change toward which we all are tending. And oh, my child, if you had failed me it would have been a sad thing for my slowly growing faith in Him.

"Come to me. Help me to find Him."

Again, as often before, there came to Linda the vision of a noble woman kneeling by the side of a girl and pleading for God's love and protecting care to be around that girl. Again the rare music of the voice sang into the young soul the line: "I will build me a nest on the greatness of God." Now and here

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in her father's home, might it not come to pass that the inspiration of those words and of that great personality should prove a Godsend to another life? Might not the torch then lighted be carried on to another and from him still again to others who are speeding the final race?

The greatness of the thought humbled her. Before its significance all consciousness of money's power faded out of her mind. The luxury around her became a trivial thing, of kin to her life's early poverty, when looked at in the light of this mighty struggle after God—a struggle which is and will be the supreme thing in existence.

Linda's presence in the home brought a change to the whole household. Even the servants went about their duties with a pleased look. For the two lonely men the days took on a wonderful brightness. To have some one to love, to plan for, to wait a meal for her coming, and have her presiding over the table, to hear her fresh young voice about the house, to watch her when some gift was offered her,—these things seemed miraculous to the men so long unused to woman's presence. They took delight in showing her whatever was of interest to her in the home,—the family portraits, a few jewels coming down from a former generation, old china that had belonged to her grandmother, and—what interested her as greatly—the library which had accumulated during the years. Linda could hardly be blamed for feeling a throb of satisfied pride to know that all this which stood for good blood and breeding, belonged to her and allied her to an honorable past.

One evening, toward the latter part of Christmas week, the three were sitting in the library where much of their time was spent, when a gentleman asking

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for Mr. Graham was announced. In a few moments the latter returned with an inscrutable look on his face: "My visitor wishes to see you, Linda."

The girl's face flushed painfully. "Is it——?"

Her grandfather smiled. "Yes, it is Mr. Ledroux."

Linda rose and stood by her uncle's chair.

"I can tell you what he wishes, dear; but I gave him to understand it would be almost impossible for us to give you up—now, just as we have found you and are learning how much happiness you can bring into our lonely home."

The younger man looked up wistfully. "It hasn't come to that—already, has it, Linda?"

"I think not, Uncle."

She stooped and kissed his forehead. He held her hand in a loving clasp. "Don't let us keep you out of happiness, dear. If it is love, we have no right to interfere."

When she had gone the two looked at each other. The father spoke: "It would be hard to do without her—hard for both of us—but I'm afraid it will end in that."

* * *

She went toward him, slowly, as if reluctant to renew the struggle. He was standing expectant.

"Linda, Linda, I cannot do without you. Come to me." He held her hands, drawing her to him, compelling her by physical mastery, by the glow in his dark eyes, the passionate thrill of voice, the half-restrained excitement of his whole being. "I love you, Linda; I love you."

She looked up. Something in that handsome face drove the blood backward and Linda drew away from him, her face white, her whole air forcing him to pause. Again he came close. "You *do* love me. You know

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you are not indifferent. I defy you to say it." He spoke softly, tenderly.

"Are you afraid of me, sweetheart? O, I would be so good to you you'd learn to love me in spite of yourself. I am not worthy of you. What man is worthy of a good woman? But my love shall make up to you for everything."

He waited a moment. "If you did not care for me at all you would have sent me away without hope before; but I knew—I knew, and now that your pride is satisfied there is no reason, is there?"

Again he took her hands, and gently drawing her to him, looked into her eyes, watching the yielding there and letting the conqueror's light flame into his own eyes.

"You *do* love me, Linda."

"Yes, yes." His arms were about her and, for the moment, all doubts and fears were forgotten as she yielded to the sweetness of his mastery.

* * *

A few days later she wrote to Fannie: "It has come. I have promised to marry Mr. Ledroux, and may God help me if I am doing wrong. My grandfather and uncle are very good about it. I am sure they wish me perfect happiness, but I am equally sure they hate to think of my marrying soon, and it shall not be for a while, anyway, though Mr. Ledroux insists on an early date. I suppose that's the regulation thing for lovers to do. . . . I am happy and yet I am miserable. To have wounded so true a heart as Harry's, to have come under the condemnation of so true a friend as yourself, makes me altogether unhappy; but when I think of having won the love of this man for whom my heart—oh! don't tell me that I have no right to this happiness."

In the Mantabalas

"My Darlingest Dear:—You are equal to a three-volume edition of the old romances—Alonzo and Melissa, for instance. Positively, I begin to feel a thrill down my spinal column when I start to open one of your letters. I had just begun to touch terra firma after the excitement brought on by your grandfather's renaissance, and now, here am I, floating in mid-air again, with visions before me, around me, above me, —visions of dark-browed heroes and golden-haired maidens on whom the veil and orange wreath have descended as if from the highest empyrean. Really, my precious friend, I wish for you all true and lovely things. Go on and enjoy your happiness and don't fancy that I, of all persons, grudge you this joy. If a girl doesn't have the right to the supreme thing when she is engaged, pray when is she to have it? As for Harry, of course he will trouble because he is made of stuff that lasts; but I believe he will come out all right. Bless you! He doesn't blame you one bit. He's taking his medicine like a man. He and I sat an evening out just before I left Marian's. I felt like laying my hand on his head and blessing him for a saint on earth. If a man ever loves me with the sort of love Harry Turner gives you I devoutly pray that the church visible will canonize him. Such beautiful devotion ought to be rewarded on this old earth as an example to would-be lovers while time lasts. A knight he is—of the old sort, if he does have a plain English, everyday name, and is a trifle awkward in getting out of a room. 'I owe her everything. She has given me my manhood and I will never forget.' Whereupon your poor little friend felt like saying some lofty thing suited to so extraordinary an occasion; but, as my custom is, I succeeded in getting off a little flighty speech with a tiny bit of slang in

In the Mantahalas

it. He laughed and that broke up the seriousness of our talk. Oh! dear; oh! dear; the heroic sentiments will never cling around me. People think of me as something to laugh with, to pass idle hours with—but enough of this! To go back to yourself, Linda. You shall not doubt my love. I will stand by you, dear heart, trusting and believing that all will be well with you, and that God will bless this marriage, will give you the happiness you so richly deserve.”

CHAPTER XIV.

UNREST.

"We are to be married in the autumn. My grandfather insists that I take a month's rest in the mountains. Uncle Cam has not been so well this spring-time and we have stayed in with him pretty closely. This, with what study I have undertaken, gives my grandfather uneasiness. He claims that I am on the brink of a breakdown and offers to get a nurse for Uncle during July and let me have a whiff of the mountain air once more. Can't you come to Aunt Sarah's with me for that month? I do not care to go where there is a crowd. It seems to me the blessed quiet of our woods and fields would restore my mental poise, would give me back my girlhood. You need not hesitate to accept our invitation,—Aunt Sarah's and my own. Some of the money that would have been my father's is being turned into channels where it will do good, we hope. My aunt's house is being enlarged. Her oldest daughter is to go to school in the fall.

"You think I ought to be happy, that everything seems to lend itself to enrich my life. You may be right, but somehow these things have failed to give me the happiness that one has a right to expect. Surely I am not physically at par. There are days in which life to me appears so unreal, so elusive, just as if

In the Mantabahas

you reach out to touch a beloved friend and wake to feel the emptiness of a dream.

"I love Mr. Ledroux, but it is just as it was before our engagement. When away from him a sense of uneasiness oppresses me. I remember how differently we look at life. It comes out at every point. Some stern old Covenanter, according to grandfather, has sent down to me a conscience that takes the brightness out of life by making me over-sensitive about little things. I see that Mr. Ledroux thinks of my beliefs as he might of a child's whims—a child who is too young and immature to judge between great and small. I need your help, you dear girl.

"Mrs. De Jarnette has another companion, but she is so good as to say that no one can take my place. I cannot quite understand her attitude toward Mr. Ledroux and myself. I know she is fond of him. He has always been intimate in her home, but somehow she has taken our engagement in a way that distresses me. If I were not sure of her love I would think she considers it a mistake, socially. Yet with her love for me and her recognition of my grandfather's position I do not believe she is reluctant for that reason. She certainly is not overjoyed. You are not a bit glad. I cannot expect Harry to be. See? Here am I with all my best friends out of sympathy with me at a time when I am so hungry for their perfect fellowship. But enough! I must be growing self-centered. Tell me of yourself, your new friends, your studies."

* * *

"Dearly Beloved:—I am so glad of that precious month-to-be. Yes, thank you, I expect to come and be happy with you once more. You write as if you had tasted the sweets of life only to find them holding

In the Mantabalas

a bitter tang at the last. Chirk up! Do you remember that classic bit from the all-around big William? The bit I love to quote?

“‘Jog on, jog on, the footpath way, and merrily hent style-a.’ If a girl can’t be happy with a golden spoon in her mouth, her hand possessed of the Midas-touch, her face with all the charm of the enchanted Beauty, pray what will make her happy?

“I want the time to hurry and bring the two of us together. You should get some good, old-fashioned doctor to prescribe for you. Not the modern sort that jerks out his scant words, peeks clean through you, then whips out a knife and prescribes a trained nurse. I suggest that your grandfather go out into the country, if necessary, and hunt up the kind that’s so nearly extinct, one who will set his saddle-bags down in a leisurely fashion, look over the top of his spectacles and call you ‘Daughter’ while he is mixing a mighty dose of rhubarb, aloes and jalap, to be preceded by eight grains of bichloride of mercury stirred in molasses. Oh, you’d forget to keep your finger-tip on your conscience if you had my kind of doctor. Don’t you believe it?

“Heigh ho! Did you know that I have seen Harry again? Marian makes fond pretension if she isn’t sincere. Really I believe she loves me, and in my heart she comes next—a far next—to you. (Remember that you dwell in my heart *of* hearts.) Since my last letter to you I have been down to spend Easter with Marian. You know the University is so much nearer our school than my own home is. The Pater and Mater are awfully good to give me such a lovely time, but I am trying to study and hope to repay them by making a woman of myself. But to go back to my visit. Harry came to see me and I feel quite proud

In the Nantahalas

of him. He continues to grow. There's nothing little or weak about him. Some of the other young men called and they were full of praise for him.

"Of course we talked of you again. Harry takes your engagement like a man. He has no blame for you. Indeed you must not think so for a moment. He is ready to believe the best things of Mr. Ledroux. He, I, all of us, wish you the greatest happiness. If your sweetheart fails in goodness I do not think your husband will do so. He will 'grow in moral height' to keep step with you."

* * *

As the train comes up from Georgia it brings the traveler into a country that gradually grows in beauty. Before the North Carolina line is reached the ridges begin to limn themselves against the distant sky. Later Tallulah Falls booms in your ear, then the hills sweep upward in loftier lines and soon you find yourself among the mountains, the air bracing every nerve and fibre of you, the beauty about you stirring your soul.

It was with a heart profoundly moved that Linda came in sight of her native mountains again. Within the year the railway from upper Georgia had been completed to the charming little town of Franklin. This gave her a more direct route to her aunt's home.

When she alighted from the train she found her cousin with his conveyance ready to take her out the remaining miles of her journey.

"Say, Lindy, we are too po' an' common for you now, I reckon?" Bob remarked as he slapped the lines and started his horse in the homeward direction. Linda felt a sudden pang of guilt. She *had* noticed the shabbiness of the outfit, an old buggy, a horse not too young and spirited for safety, and a

In the Mantabalas

set of pieced-out harness. The young fellow's dress, too, had come in for a moment's half-conscious criticism. His store clothes imperfectly fitted, his air of partial bravado as if he meant to declare himself as good as anybody,—these things struck unpleasantly on her quickened sense of propriety. The men among whom she had moved these later months had been always at ease; never conscious of their apparel; never, apparently, thinking of their standing with their fellows. Her grandfather was one who would quietly stand with kings and be unabashed, yet never bold. Mr. Ledroux with, perhaps, a touch of haughtiness, was always outwardly perfect in manner. The girl felt ashamed that these thoughts should flash through her brain. Could she never be straightforward?

"Don't say those things, Bob. I shall never be able to repay your mother—all of you—for the kindness you have always shown me, and I would be basely ungrateful if I allowed the accident of money to make a difference with me. Really, do you believe that money makes anybody better than you are?"

The young fellow squared his shoulders, set his face in firmer lines and answered with an air of positiveness:

"Nary bit."

Linda noticed the lapse into sixteenth century English, and thought of her lover with his polished speech, his conversational charm, his air of high breeding. Her heart sank within her. Would she feel ashamed, before Mr. Ledroux, of the homely ways of her people? *Her* people! Pride rose in rebellion. Were not her people really the ones with whom she had lived of late—men of her father's blood, knit to her by closest ties, by heredity, by sympathy, by fineness of soul?

In the Mantabalas

Need she be forever reproaching herself because she could not overcome the shrinking nerve when one of her mother's race showed the crudeness of an unlettered boor.

She looked at the lad's face and again an overwhelming sense of littleness swept over her as she remembered that here, as so often before, her judgment dealt only with the surface and did not plumb the depths. With an effort she shook herself loose from such thought and began talking brightly and kindly to the boy.

After many questions in regard to Aunt Sarah and the rest of the family she came around to the subject of the new house which she supposed was nearing completion.

"Miss Wells looked after it a whole lot. It seems like she knew exactly what the men ought to do, but I've been afeard it might be too plain to suit you, long as you're used to such fine doin's, but Miss Wells said you didn't want no banjo-work anywhere about the house. It jus' suits us to a T, Ma' 'n' Pa both say it looks so home-like an' ever' day—not too good and fine to use. They've got big fireplaces jus' like you said, an' big rooms an' wide porches. Miss Wells says it'll suit you too, an' we all talk a heap about you bein' so good to us. The girls say you always wus better to Ma than they wus."

"Oh, no, I was thoughtful because I was older. That was all," then Linda turned the conversation in other directions.

As they drove through the lovely country, along the limpid creeks, now skirting the wooded hillsides, now passing through the fragrant forest, the girl gave herself up to the beauty, the infinite peace of it all.

In the Mantabhalas

The sight of the Bald brought the tears to her eyes. Like some great calm eternal Presence the soothing power of it sank into her spirit and quieted the tumult there.

CHAPTER XV.

HOME AGAIN.

Two weeks had passed since Linda's home-coming. During the time Miss Wells had been much with her. The girl turned to the older woman for that quiet, unspoken sympathy which is the finest fruitage of friendship. Miss Wells saw that Linda was passing through a crucial stage in her development. To her knowledge of the world's ways the missionary joined a deeply sympathetic insight. She recognized the struggle going on in the girl's nature as she strove to adjust herself to the changed conditions of her life.

Within the two weeks the last touches had been given the new house. Some new furnishings, simple but good, had been brought from Franklin and Miss Wells had moved in as a regular boarder, a state of things delightful to the whole family.

"She is a good un," declared the youngest boy to Linda. "Co'se she preaches a little in the prayer meetings an' sech as that, but she's got a way that makes a fellow like her anyhow. Pa didn't take to her for a long time. Said he didn't believe in a woman tryin' to be a man, but he's plum took up with her now."

Linda smiled in repeating this to Miss Wells later. "I am sure you appreciate the force of his expression, but how is one to put it into good English for him?" and the girl sighed.

In the Mantabalas

The two had gone down to the spring to carry milk and butter, for Linda insisted on taking a share in the household work. Tempted by the cool shade, the soft lapping of the water, the breath of the woodland, they had seated themselves near the spring to rest.

Miss Wells laid her hand gently on Linda's. "Don't distress yourself over these little things, dear. Jack has the making of a man in him and you will yet be proud of him."

The girl looked mutely in her friend's face.

"I know, I know. You have not opened your heart to me, Linda, but I see the brave fight you are making. You are young and all these things are terribly real to you. Youth does not have the perspective that later years bring one. The sorrows of life help to change our views, and when you are as old as I am and have buried as many hopes, a lapse in grammar will not seem so vital to you."

"I am ashamed of this foolish sensitiveness."

"Yes, but it will all pass away. Besides, your aunt's family improve steadily in many ways. I have been struck with the adaptability of your mountain people. They have strength of character that gives them individuality, and yet, when they wish, they can catch on to the little niceties of life in a wonderfully short time. I say 'they' in speaking to you because you have always been exceptional. But you see how your cousins—the two girls—are developing?"

"Yes, oh, yes, and there is so much that is true and good in all of them, I am ashamed that I should let other things crowd out my appreciation of that fact."

"It will be all right. You are taking life a little tragically just now. Going through your 'storm and

In the Mantabalas

stress' period, perhaps. I saw Harry yesterday." There was a pause. Linda made no answer.

"We spoke of you. He tells me that—— Of course I knew, long ago, that matters were at an end with you and Harry. He wrote me that before the holidays. And now——"; another pause.

"He tells you of my engagement?"

"Yes; he supposed I knew of it, and was afraid he had done wrong in mentioning it to me."

"I have wanted to talk to you, to open all my heart, but it has been hard to begin. Aunt Sarah knows. The girls do not."

"Don't tell me if you had rather not. You know I am always interested in whatever concerns you, but I do not wish to force your confidence. There are some things too tender to be put into words."

"I think the doubts make it hard for me to talk to you. With you my better self is uppermost. In your presence when I think of Mr. Ledroux it seems no great matter that he is a cultured man, aristocratic to the very heart, that he has money and high social position. The greatest question, as I think of him in the light of your eyes, is whether or not he is a good man."

"You could pay me no higher compliment, Linda. Would you like to tell me all about him?"

Beginning with their first meeting in Eagle's Nest, a year before, Linda told of her acquaintance with her lover, how the intellectual charm of the man had first drawn her, how she had been flattered by his attention, and later had withdrawn herself from him because of her wounded pride. She talked of her own inward struggle, the fight with that part of her nature which yielded to the compelling power of his brain, his vivid personality; how part of her seemed to rise

In the Mantabalas

in rebellion against his dominance while the other half clamored for the sweetness of his presence. "And when I had gone to my grandfather's he followed me, claiming my love, refusing to hear any objection, forcing from me the truth, that I could not be indifferent to him. Before he left me I surrendered. I gave myself up to happiness and for a while did not stop to think of duty, of anything but the fact that a wonderful joy had come into my life. But I am not made for happiness. No sooner had he gone than all my questioning began again. And now that I am at home with those who have done so much for me and for whom I ought to have all gratitude and loyal love, it shames me to feel that I might be ashamed of them before him. Don't you see? Is it weak of me to be confused? If it were necessary for me to choose between him and them I would let him go, and yet my pride rebels when I think of his possible attitude toward them."

"I think you distress yourself unnecessarily, Linda. If Mr. Ledroux is the man he should be, you will have no need to be ashamed of your family before him. He will recognize their true worth and honor you for your devotion to them."

"Perhaps it would have been better for all of us if I had cared for Harry as he deserved."

"Oh, I don't know. The heart is not to be driven, and you did right in being frank with Harry. It would have been unjust to the boy to give him a half-love."

"And still I recognize the fact that he is better than Mr. Ledroux—a better man."

"You feel that way, Linda? But I think few young people fall in love with goodness."

In the Nantahalas

"It's not a question of being religious at all. It's so many things—the way he judges men and women. Harry's faith in others gives one a stronger desire to do the right thing. It doesn't seem to occur to him that people are going to do wrong."

"That's youth. If he should have a few shocks given him he might be different when he reaches Mr. Ledroux's age."

"At any rate it has comforted me to talk to you, and you're good to hear with me like you do. If I stay with you and Fannie a month I'll get to be a natural, happy-hearted girl, maybe."

The next day Bob and Linda met Fannie at Nantahala depot, the station from which Linda had taken flight into the outer world two years before. Bob was driving a wagon in which to bring Fannie's trunk while Linda drove a strongly built buggy, a present of her own to Aunt Sarah since her arrival.

To the girl's surprise she had found hesitancy among the members of her aunt's family when the question of money was brought up.

"Your uncle says the house has paid for all we've done for you, Lindy; an' I think so, too, because you've been such a help to me 'most all yo' life. An' he says 'twon't be good for the children to think we can always be gittin' money from you, or presents. So I thought I'd speak to you about it so's you'll be keerful an' not give too many things to the girls. But we think it's pow'ful nice for you to want to give us all so much. Your uncle says them Yankees that keep sendin' boxes an' barrels down to the Dell settlement means well, but they are makin' paupers out of the whole neighborhood. The folks are plum no 'count now. Nary girl among 'em will hire out to do

In the Mantabahas

a day's work, an' even Miss Bowles wear clo'es made out of goods they send, an' you know the Bowleses are good liver's."

Bearing this in mind Linda had gone to her uncle and had a talk with him. As a result of their conversation he went to Franklin and selected a buggy suited to the mountain roads. "She's a fine girl es ever I seen, Sarah. It seemed lak it would 'most break her heart when I sorter shut down on this here doin' so much for us. To be sure, we did take keer of her when she was a little fixin', but she paid for that long ago, besides the house. An' pretty! Shucks, there's nary girl in the settlement can hold a candle to her. An' so fur as I've seen the summer bo'ders don't look no nicer than she does."

* * *

"It's glorious to be with you once more, Linda, and I mean to make the most of these weeks.

"If I'm to lose you soon let me have all of you for this one while. I expect to be selfish, exacting, absorbing—all the disagreeable adjectives you can think of.

"It is like a page from a fairy story book, sure enough. To think that you should find your father's people after these years, and that they should turn out to be so fine toward you. That grandfather is a genuine trump, and I give three cheers for him right here upon the top of this mountain.

"Ah, well! it's a pretty good old world, after all, and I propose to get a lot of fun out of it. The Mater did herself proud when she went to buy my summer outfit. I have conceived a violent passion for embroidered waists. You ought to see what beautiful ones I have. She did most of the work herself, and they are *heavenly*.

In the Mantabalas

"I see you are shocked at the way I run on. Of course I ought to forswear slang, and a waist can't be quite heavenly, but one needn't always be splitting hairs. A *queenly* waist, how does that strike you? If the Bible can speak of a 'lordly dish' why can't I discourse about a queenly waist? O-o-oh! how divine!" They had reached the crest of a ridge. Before them lay a valley through which flowed a stream, while the flanking hillsides were backed by far-stretching lines of mountains, peak after peak, the nearer ones blue as azure skies, the further ones soft in tender amethystine haze.

"I don't wonder that you are so intense, my beloved. If I had lived alone with all this beauty I'd be quieter, myself, but you see I've always been surrounded by people and things till I didn't have time for high thoughts."

Linda smiled and kept silent while Fannie ran on giving vent to her spirits.

"Rouse up, my dear. Does this enchanted stream have a name? Or is it all some mirage of my overheated imagination?"

"This? Why I believe it's the upper waters of Cartoogechaye. An Indian name, you see."

"Certainly. How disappointed I would have been if you had told me it was Pick-Shin or some such plebeian name."

"We are not very far from the old Selden home. It is considered one of the prettiest old places in the county."

"Do we pass the house?"

"In sight of the grove, though it is across the creek and high up on the hill," and Linda pointed to a mountain ridge in front of them and on the right of the valley.

In the Mantabahas

"The Selden family is a large one. They have married and intermarried until they are related to so many of the county's best people. Every year they have a family reunion with some member of the 'clan.' I have been told their meetings are interesting even to outsiders."

"Perhaps they are the family meetings Elise Williams used to talk of. You never knew Elise. She was in school the year before you came. A nice girl and a good student. She must be related to the Seldens. I don't remember the name, but her mother's people lived over this way, west of Asheville."

"She may be in the old Selden home now. A Mr. Williams, from Transylvania, has recently bought the farm and moved to it. He has a young lady daughter, I hear. Her mother was a Miss Selden."

"It must be the same girl. I hope we will see her. Really she was a fine girl, two or three years older than myself, but we were very good friends."

"I have never known the family. We live several miles from any of them except these newcomers. The old home has been rented for several years."

"I believe it will be quite the thing for me to let Elise know that I am in the neighborhood. How far is the place from your aunt's?"

"Six miles. The way is rough, of course, but we don't think so much of the roads in the mountains if they are passable in summer time. My uncle speaks often of the different men in the Selden connection. They form a large part of the leaders in county affairs, in business and politics. And while they have had better advantages than many of the mountain people they are absolutely loyal to their native section, I believe."

The two were driving slowly now, waiting a little,

In the Mantabalas

at intervals, to see Bob's wagon in the far distance back of them.

At an abrupt curve in the road they met a surrey with two ladies on the back seat and a young man driving.

"Ah, I believe this is Elise Williams. I'm not quite sure," Fannie spoke in an undertone.

The road was narrow, the bluff shelving down precipitately in a dangerous-looking fashion to which the mountaineers seem calmly indifferent.

"Horrors! you don't intend to drive by that conveyance, Linda. We'll certainly be killed."

"One might think you'd been brought up in the sand hills, Fannie. There is no danger."

"If the young lady is frightened I'll lead your horse," the young man gave the lines to one of the ladies in his surrey, alighted and, lifting his hat, took Linda's horse by the bridle, and led him carefully past his own conveyance keeping on the inside while the surrey passed slowly by on the other side.

"Thank you so much."

He bowed and smiled, went back to the surrey and interchanged a few words with its occupants, then hurried around and stopped Linda's horse again.

"I beg pardon, but my sister thinks she knows this young lady. Is it Miss Everett, of Brevard?"

"Yes, and your sister is Miss Elise Williams? I was sure of it. I am delighted. My friend, Miss Graham, Mr. Williams."

Fannie's voice was the signal for the young lady in the surrey to get out and come forward. Then followed a lively conversation in hearty school-girl style.

There were promises of an early call and insistence from Elise that a part of the coming month be spent

In the Mantabalas

by Fannie and Linda as guests in her home. Mrs. Williams seconded the invitation warmly and, after a few moments of happy, if not coherent talk, the parties drove on their separate ways, the surrey making room for Bob's wagon as he came up.

"I am glad of this, especially for your sake, Fannie. There is promise of some social pleasure for you now. I had nothing to offer you unless, indeed, I felt free to call Harry in."

"But I came to see *you*, beloved."

CHAPTER XVI.

FANNIE.

If Linda had felt any uneasiness as to the manner in which Fannie would fit into her aunt's home her mind was soon set at rest. The girl captured them all by her happy nature, her free-and-easy fellowship. She won the mother's heart by her camaraderie with Jack, her kindness to the girls and her gentle consideration for herself.

"I dreaded her just a little bit, Linda. Seems like we've been raised so different from folks in town or below the mountains, but she's just as common as any of us. There ain't any 'put on' about her. 'N' she 'pyears to be havin' a plum good time. It's funny to see her and Jack an' that little contrary pony. Don't you think he throwed her clean off this mornin' 'n' she gets right up 'n' mounts him again while Jack holds him for her?"

"Yes, she told me. She is full of talk about Jack; thinks he is such a bright boy below that dry way he has of talking."

It did Linda good to see her aunt brighten under the new surroundings. With the comforts of the new house, the hardest drudgery done by a woman who came to help three days out of the week, the tired mother's life took on fresh hope and vigor. She was anxious to have her young daughters follow in the ways of those who were bringing the outer world

In the Mantabals

among them, the big world with its finer speech, its greater ease of manner,—all those countless little things that emphasize the difference between crudity and culture. Yet deep within the unlettered woman's heart was the mountaineer's pride, keeping her free from cringeing imitation, and giving to her a touch of dignity that won the respect of those around her.

In all her life she had never known the happiness of this time. Miss Wells, with her tact and deep spiritual nature, had long been a source of comfort to her. From the missionary the mountain woman had imbibed a calmer, more cheerful view of religion and its bearing on one's daily life. And if she had lost somewhat of that tense emotionalism which once characterized her religious experience she had gained a surer hold on the larger truths of the Christian life.

These things conspired to brighten the woman and bring new cheer into the home.

Harry Turner had become a frequent visitor since Fannie's arrival. Elise Williams and her brother called within a few days after her coming. Then began a series of visits, picnics and little excursions to points of interest in the mountains. In making up these the young people turned to Miss Wells, not so much as chaperone in the usual sense, but because her presence brightened the whole party. She went into such things with the zest of unconquerable youth, and if her influence was always directed toward positive right it was in a way so quiet and unobtrusive she never repelled.

During this time Mr. Ledroux had written letters to Linda that kept the girl in a state of unrest. They were influenced by the mood of the hour, and at times would be filled with protestations of love and

In the Mantabalas

earnest talk of her influence over him, how life was taking on a different coloring for him under the power of this mighty passion.

"I wasted the emotions of my youth. Long ago I gave up any thought of being dominated by one supreme love. It seemed to me that men and women were like cogs in the wheels of complicated machinery. They fit,—then a sudden break displaces the cogs. When the machinery starts again the working may be as smooth as it was before the displacement. Of course this belief does away with all fanciful notions about matches being made in heaven, about Providence having anything to do with the matter at all. But when I think of you I am ready to believe that some mighty creative force made you for my mate, kept you, and gave you to me while your heart is fresh and pure and all untarnished by the world. But, great God! that God in whom you believe so strongly,—what right have I to claim your purity, to fancy that you were intended for me who have only imperfectness to match with your completeness?" Again his letters would betray the old cynic mood wherein the scoffer spared little that came upon his notice. After receiving one of these Linda would move more quietly among her friends, and Fannie would redouble her efforts to bring the smile, the happy light to the girl's eyes.

"I don't one bit like it, Miss Wells. Whenever the time comes that I am engaged you'll see one happy little silly, for I shall love with my whole being before I make any promises. Of course Linda loves the man, and, indeed, he is handsome enough and fascinating enough, for any use, but he has never made her happy. She was all upset when they were at Eagle's

In the Mantabalas

Nest together last summer and you see how his letters affect her now. Has she talked much to you about him?"

"Not since she first told me of him. She is a bit shy about the whole matter, but I would be surprised if she were otherwise."

"Certainly I don't expect her to be demonstrative over anything, but she is so restless, so unsettled. You'd look for a girl of her sort to be quietly happy, in a deep, still way, you know, like a mountain lake that reflects all the beauty and light around it. Now don't you think that's a bloomin' fine metaphor, simile or whatever? Acknowledge that your new friend has more profundity than you had imagined," and Fannie snatched the little woman around the waist, swung her in a giddy whirl down the length of the side porch and fetched up with a sudden jerk just as a door opened nearby.

"Sh—sh! Odds bodykins! Some one appears and will behold the missionary in the act of waltzing with one of the worldly-minded.

"Ah, it's only Miss Graham who sometimes hath a worldly mind herself. Behold! She hath news to communicate. I know it by the flush upon her face and the fire within those orbs of light," and Fannie struck a theatrical attitude in front of Linda while Miss Wells smoothed her own ruffled hair and adjusted her collar.

"Indeed I do have news," Linda looked from one to the other. "This is a letter from——"

"The conquering hero comes, I'm sure of it. Is it the caitiff, Ledroux? And he comes? Then——"

"Mr. Ledroux is at Eagle's Nest and proposes to come on here in a few days, if I am willing."

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"My reign is ended. 'Hail to the chief who in triumph advances.' Let me subdue my feelings and meet him with becoming fortitude, though I shall forever cherish dire animosity against him."

"Seriously, shall I let him come? What do you think, Miss Wells?"

"Why not, if it suits your aunt?"

"She doesn't object. I've just spoken to her."

"Yes, let him come on and see if Jack and I can't play some prank on him to get him out of that sixteenth century grand manner of his—that heirloom manner."

"He will probably be here then at the time of the Selden reunion, I'd hate to miss that. It was so good of the Williams family to invite us."

"Take him along," said Fannie, "and let him see more than a hundred 'Hill Billies' together at one time, in all their native wildness and benightedness."

"I'd enjoy seeing the impression a regular 'grand seigneur' would make on some of those bush-men."

"Fannie, you are incorrigible. I'm afraid you'll be scoring me for coming down to teach the 'mountain whites'!"

"No, you precious little creature, I forgive you for all mistakes you ever made since the time you used to put the baby Hindus to bed with a prayer and then go out and call them 'rectangular parallelopipedons' to ease your lacerated feelings—or temper, if you prefer plain English."

"Really I sometimes fear my time is being wasted," sighed Miss Wells. "I have found things so different from what I expected, and often I feel that the people may consider my very presence an insult. Since knowing the town of Franklin I am more than ever in doubt about the wisdom of working here."

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"You shall not feel that way," said Linda. "Remember what you have been to us. The world is a different place for me because of you."

"Yes, and Harry says you've helped him more than he can tell. You don't know how he honors you. But you never came among the mountain people with what Lawyer McEachern, of Asheville, calls 'damned supercilious airs'."

"Oh! Fannie, don't! That's too horrible—to quote an oath is almost as bad as, as——"

"As improvising one? I do beg your pardon, you dear little preacher, and I promise you to be more careful in the future. Now kiss me, Reverend Wells, and tell me that I am a superior young woman in spite of my failings."

"Indeed you are, Fannie. All your nonsense does not hide the real girl whose heart is gold."

"Thank you for the words. They will help to make me better," and Fannie's eyes filled with tears.

"You don't need to be better," Linda spoke with emphasis. "You never hesitate where the right is concerned, if you do have an original way of doing things."

"And this in spite of my tendency to slang? My general silliness? A fine deliverance for you, O, Queen of Hearts. I shall grow good in spite of myself if you continue to praise me. 'Thy gentleness hath made me great,'" and Fannie made a profound bow to her friend.

"You referred to the town of Franklin a while ago. What special thing in connection with that place has put you into mourning over your having come 'down like a wolf on the fold' to compel these poor mountaineers to be good?" Fannie turned again toward Miss Wells.

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"Franklin is such an exceptional village, that's all. I have never seen so much real culture—not showiness, understand—as there is in that bit of a town. Of course I mean such a percentage of cultured people. It's all so genuine, so unpretending, so thoroughly delightful. Here I've been lending my little collection of books to boys and girls, any one who cared for them, and over there is a good library absolutely free to every citizen of the county."

"Yes," said Linda; "but if you had not been among us, directing our reading and helping us to love books, a library at that distance could have done us little good."

"Perhaps," Miss Wells spoke doubtfully; "but the whole county is bound to be influenced by the town. It's a leaven that works from within too, not an effort from the outside. And your county has had a compulsory educational law for several years; besides you anticipated state prohibition."

"All this doesn't mean that your work is not needed among us. While we don't have the feuds and vendettas and other romantic embellishments that Mr. Fox's or Miss Murfree's mountaineers have, there are plenty of hiding places for moonshiners and sometimes a murder strikes home to us all. Remember how the preacher's wife laughed over the calm way the little Jap addressed her that Sunday afternoon? When she started to shake hands he casually remarked: 'Will you excuse me while I wash my hands? There was a murder down there in the road and I got bloody.' And that, mind you, his first appointment to preach in our county—a heathen Jap studying for the ministry in this Christian land. Oh! we need you, and you are doing a world of good among us. Just think of

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what a difference there is in Coon Bletcher and his wife since you've been a friend to them."

"But you know Harry did more for Coon than I have done."

Fannie laid a firm hand over Miss Wells's mouth. "Will you be pleased to abstain from disputation which profiteth nothing, Right Reverend little woman? You are the salt of the earth, and you are savoring the very spot in the universe that needs you, and you shall not have any more such blue Monday discourse. Come with me. Susan went down to the spring to churn an hour ago. I pine, I thirst, I *hone* for buttermilk. Come."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LOVER'S COMING.

"I have been sick, depressed, out of love with life, and I need you sorely. I do not expect to stay long at Eagle's Nest in any event, but if you let me come to you I will hurry across from some convenient point on the Murphy road. You will let me come?" His letter had run thus. The words appealed to the woman-heart more than any impassioned eloquence, and as the time came on for his arrival she found herself anxiously expectant, longing for the sight of her lover, imagining the look of him, the glad light leaping to his eyes, the old compelling mastery of his presence.

In the afternoon of the day he was expected Fannie announced that she was going to help about the kitchen and dining-room.

"I propose to make myself invisible to the gentleman till tea-time, then I shall dazzle him by my beauty and culinary skill. In the meantime, Linda, suppose you adorn yourself and go to meet your lord. Really, I think it would be a good plan for you to take Miss Wells and go for a walk in the Nantahala direction. You might be gathering flowers, but that's entirely too suggestive of Persephone and the infernal regions, to say nothing of the dark-browed gentleman who drove the chariot. Go along with you, and take care of your over-burdened heart while I devise some tempting

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dessert to supplement Aunt Sarah's fried chicken and eggs and such."

"Shall we go, Linda?" asked Miss Wells.

"I think I should like the woods," answered Linda, and later, dressed in simple white and accompanied by her friend, the girl went toward the belt of trees that borders the little valley beyond the house as you go toward the enclosing mountains.

The sweet stillness and all the solemn beauty of the scene sank into the heart of the girl. As they came into the cool depths of the grove Linda murmured:

"Into the woods my Master went,
And he was clean forspent, forspent."

I wish it was possible for me to tell Sidney Lanier what he has been to me. That must be one of the greatest rewards a writer has, the knowing that his words have helped others to a better life."

"You seem to have the one high conception of literature. But your great critics would tell you that's a child's view, that literature is only truth in portrayal of life, whatever the effect."

"Oh, I don't believe it. Doing right or wrong makes up so much of life, surely whatever bears on that is worth everything to us." As she said the words her mind went back to the evenings when Ledroux had read to her and Mrs. De Jarnette and had discussed the books afterward. His views had jarred on her then and now the thought of it gave her poignant grief. Always there was the discordant note of cynicism, the scoffing at any ethical tendency.

"Tolstoi? He has elements of greatness, I grant you, and sometimes he is fine, but he continually obscures his power by preaching.

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"Poe is your true American poet writing for all time and places. Lowell, and, perhaps, Longfellow, might have written poetry if they had been able to get away from the New England conscience."

How well she remembered such phrases, burned into her brain at the time by the charm of the man, his perfection of manner, his dominating intellectuality.

Linda did not speak of these things to her friend. All the tenderness of her nature had been stirred by Ledroux's letter, and she could not bear to criticise him.

* * *

They met him there where the road winds around the rocky hillside and comes steeply down to cross a ravine. He dismounted, and, leading his horse, walked beside her. The glory of a mountain wood was about them, the richness of green things, the fine aura which is too elusive and delicate to be called an odor, but suggests the breath of a hama-dryad. The soft haze of approaching evening surrounded them, the half-sad and wholly tender stillness that falls on the woods when birds are quieting down for the night and only send out a few faint notes of love, calling their mates who are still a-wing.

"You seem some spirit of the wilds, some dryad whose home is here. I have often fancied you just this way, coming toward me in the dusk of the forest—and in white, too! Let me touch you, Linda, and see that you are quite real and not a nymph who flies at my approach." He laid his hand gently on hers.

They had paused for the horse to drink from the crystal waters of the brook. Miss Wells had walked on, leaving the lovers alone.

Linda looked up in his face. Something had changed him. It was as if a blight—just the first faint

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touch of age—had dimmed the brilliance of his eyes, had hung across his face a shadow, dusky, if almost imperceptible.

"You are not well. I see it."

"I am not. And, you know, men are impatient with that sort of thing. We need to be braced by a woman. I do need you, Linda. You are my hope of salvation for time and eternity."

"Don't, O don't! No living being can be that to you."

"You have unsettled me, little girl; now you must do your best to fix my faith."

"I don't understand."

"Don't you see? Long ago I had pushed aside all questions of a religious sort except as they were forced on me. Agnosticism seemed to me the only rational attitude. I cannot reason myself into anything else, but of late, since knowing you, and especially since you belong to me, I do not find myself able to drive these things out of my mind. Life is worth more to me than ever before, yet the very fullness of it saddens me. Shall I hold you a year, ten, twenty, even thirty years, simply to lose you forever? The thought is maddening, and I know nowhere to turn for relief unless you can help me. Can't you, sweetheart? Come to me now. Marry me to-morrow—to-day. Will you?"

"O, I can't, I can't."

"You mean you do not love me well enough. Is it that?"

"No, no. I do love you, but there are other things to think of. I will get ready soon, but not now. You do not mean it?"

"Perhaps it was unreasonable of me to expect it," he said quietly as they started on the homeward road.

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Meeting her lover thus, his appeal to her, lifted the girl to a high plane and smoothed out all difficulties she might have foreseen in bringing him into her aunt's family.

In the case of her grandfather the uplift of her emotions had made her indifferent to the luxury of his home. Now the same exaltation brought her to realize the slight difference there is between the unlettered and the cultured where the vital things of the heart are at issue.

When they reached the house Miss Wells and Mrs. Gentry met them on the porch, and if the latter felt any fear of the city-bred man it showed itself only in additional quiet of manner.

While Linda had not been over-communicative toward Mr. Ledroux she had been honest. He knew the intellectual barrenness of her early life and how Miss Wells, with her friendship and sweet womanly wisdom, had stirred the sleeping nature of the girl.

Thus forewarned, and filled, moreover, with the customary notions of the mountaineer's ignorance, lawlessness and skill at moonshining, there was no danger that Ledroux would talk above the heads of his audience.

The evening passed off pleasantly, though Bob and Jack refused to eat before the new guest.

"Shucks! I can't eat without chokin' before strangers, nohow, Miss Fannie, and I'll tend to the pony an' feed his horse an' wait for the last table."

"Jack, Jack, don't murder the President's English so. You mean you can't eat before strangers without choking, and you shouldn't say 'nohow'."

"Now, Miss Fannie, don't you go to goin' back on me, that way. Callie and Susan worry me mor'n a little about my grammar. They air gitting pow'ful

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airish, it 'pears to me. A feller hain't got time to watch ever' breath he draws. He's got to have a little while to grow in."

"But I want you to speak correctly. Some day you may be a big lawyer or preacher, then you'll thank me for trying to purify your English."

"Do you kyer what sort o' talk I have, sho' 'nough?"

"Certainly, Jack."

"Then I'll be doggoned if I don't do better."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE REUNION.

To the city-worn man those days in the Nantahalas were idyllic. The lure of the mountains, the old primeval call back to nature, made themselves felt and heard. They lived much in the open. As at Eagle's Nest, the year before, he and Linda would take long tramps through the woods, usually with Miss Wells and Fannie or the Gentry girls accompanying them. A camping party to the Wayah Bald was made up, with Miss Wells as chaperone. Elise Williams and her brother joined them in this trip and with Fannie in good trim, as she announced, there was no lack of fun for the younger, or livelier members of the party.

While on this excursion reference was made to the family gathering which was to be held at the Williams' home within a few days, and Elise extended an invitation to Mr. Ledroux.

"I'm dreadfully uneasy about it, though," declared Elise to Fannie later. "He seems so—he has such beautiful manners."

"Beautiful! Beau-eau-cautiful," murmured Fannie. "He is such an adorable mixture of Sir Charles Grandison and Beau Brummel you fear that Cousin Henry might take large bites of pie in his presence, or Cousin John might disgrace the connection by dropping a *g* or eliding an *l*. It's a critical situation you are in. I suggest that you send out letters except to those who

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have 'phones, and implore them to watch their *g's* and *l's* as well as mind their *p's* and *q's!*" This last was delivered in a tragic whisper.

"You're as full of nonsense as ever, Fannie Everett," and Elise laughed.

"You mean by that, you consider me a wise, young philosopher, who has gripped Life by the right hand and means to make the most of her. Mr. Ledroux does look the polished man of the world; but, privately, if I were you, I'd give myself no uneasiness. Real manhood is the thing that counts after all."

* * *

The morning of the reunion found Linda, her guests, Miss Wells and the two Gentry girls joining the crowd that drove through the big gate and into the grove that surrounds the Williams home. Buggies, wagons, surreys, filled with happy-looking people,—laughing children along with soberer age, thronged the place and gave it a holiday aspect.

Elise's brother met Linda's party at the gate and led the conveyance around through the grove to the front of the house where the ladies of the Williams family welcomed the party and introduced them to various members of the connection who happened to be near.

The crowd was falling into groups. Here and there on the spacious lawn were young people sitting on the grass laughing and talking, while on the side porches and the big front rooms and hall the older people were settling for conversation.

As Elise led them into the house she paused near a group of elderly ladies who were sitting on the front porch.

"Linda, Fannie; all of you, I want you to meet our Aunt Janet, Mrs. Thompson," Fannie spoke in low

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tones. "We think she is a great woman. She is certainly one of the best women I have ever known. Shall I introduce you now?"

"Certainly. Yes, indeed," Linda moved onward, followed by the rest of the party.

The center of the group and the oldest of its members was a white-haired lady upon whose face the record of beautiful years had left its mark. Dressed plainly and with absolute disregard of prevailing style, there was still something—an indescribable something—that marked her as being superior to the accident of clothes or other outside accompaniments. In youth she could not have been pretty. Her features were too strong and rugged to suggest feminine beauty, but a wonderful charm rested upon her. That face was so full of benignity, so alight with beauty of soul, everyone felt its power. She shook hands with the young people as they were presented to her.

"Will you sit here with the old folks or would you rather be out among the younger ones? We like to have our friends feel perfectly at home when they attend these gatherings."

"There are others I'd like to have you meet. Later you may come back to Aunt Janet."

A few moments in the house, meeting different ones, mainly elderly and middle-aged ladies, then on to the lawn where the party was broken up, some lingering with one cluster of youngsters, while others passed on with Elise.

"Ah! I didn't know you were here, Harry. You remember Mr. Ledroux, Mr. Turner?" Linda had passed near two young men who were seated under a tree in earnest conversation. Glancing back she recognized Harry and paused. He came forward

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and offered his hand. "Yes, my friend here—Mr. Lytle, Miss Graham, Mr. Ledroux—was good enough to ask me. He's on the inside, you know. Are you a collateral, Ben?"

"No; a direct descendant. If there's anything to be made out of being a Selden here, to-day, I want to claim it all. I shall expect as big a slice of the oldest great-aunt's cake as any of them."

"Is a great-aunt's cake one of the features of the occasion?" asked Ledroux.

"Yes; a replica of the one made for her wedding feast."

"Mr. Ledroux, I will leave you to the care of these young men. I want the girls a few minutes."

A little later Elise called to young Lytle to come, as he was needed in arranging the table.

"An unusual gathering this, Mr. Turner," said Ledroux. "American families scatter so widely a reunion of this size is out of the ordinary. I take it that most of the people here are members of the Selden family."

"There are only a few guests, I believe. It strikes me that it is unusual in the make-up of the crowd also, as well as in its size."

"I agree with you. It speaks well for your mountains that they breed such men and women."

"I did not mean to draw from you anything in praise of our mountains,—I am a native myself, sir. But I had just been looking over the crowd as they gathered. Some are strangers to me, but Lytle and I were discussing them. He was giving me information. You see over there several men—near that oak?" and Harry pointed in the direction indicated.

"Yes?" tentatively.

"The tall man, the very slender one, is in charge

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of the biggest church enterprise in the South. The young fellow standing near him, talking to him just now, is a physician in Asheville. After graduating from one of our State colleges he took his degree at Columbia. His brother, sitting on the grass there with the young folks, graduated at the same college, then spent two years at Cornell. His sister, who is just back from a trip to Europe, is about here somewhere. A graduate of Columbia, she is. Back with the tall man you see the sons of Mrs. Thompson, graduates from a Georgia college—but I bore you.”

“Not at all, Mr. Turner; I am interested.”

“The youngster over there between those two girls is one of the brightest boys at our University, while his father, who is too busy to attend these meetings, does brilliant surgical work,—work that would do credit to any city surgeon. He is said to have one of the finest private libraries in the State. You will pardon me if I seem to boast of our section—our little corner. But you must know we would become sensitive after having our ignorance and degradation exploited from one end of the Union to the other.”

“I see—and understand.”

“Why, sir, I find almost as much misapprehension about the ‘mountain whites,’ down among the fellows from eastern Carolina as you might be expected to have, or as a Northerner would have. At first the boys in the University watched us as if we were expected to be forever doing some outlandish thing, and it was a source of wonder to them when we managed to speak English that they could understand. But I beg your pardon. The subject is one that sometimes rouses me, and I have allowed myself to be tiresome.”

“No apologies are necessary, Mr. Turner. I admire your spirit, and I do not wonder that you resent the

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attitude so many hold toward the mountain people. It's due to misinformation. Mr. Charles Dudley Warner says in his 'Tour on Horseback' through the Carolina mountains, that he had thought nothing in American civilization could surprise him, but that he *was* surprised at the Worth home in Ashe County. I own to being astonished at finding so much education in an isolated section."

"Our little county seat, the home of a large part of the Selden family, may be exceptional, but I have thought its very isolation, its quiet, encouraged reading and thorough culture."

"Doubtless."

In a few moments Linda and Elise returned. Not long afterward "dinner" was announced.

A long temporary table was placed in the grove. A knoll gently sloping toward the house offered an ideal place for the meal. Here the crowd gathered and, standing about the table or in groups nearby, bowed their heads reverently while the minister invoked a blessing. From every home represented by members of the family, except a few who were in the county as guests for the occasion, hampers had been brought filled with substantial food as well as the most tempting delicacies. These had been emptied and spread on the table. Bright-looking girls and motherly women busied themselves in serving the meal to the crowd, some of them scattered throughout the grove.

The invited guests were made to feel that they were conferring pleasure by attending, and it pleased Linda to see that Mr. Ledroux was enjoying the simplicity and informality of the occasion.

Toward the close of the meal Linda was standing alone at some distance from the table when Mrs.

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Thompson came to her with a cup of coffee. "I hope you are enjoying our gathering, Miss Graham. Of course it can't mean much to outsiders, but it has always been one of the greatest pleasures of my life."

Linda answered pleasantly, and Mrs. Thompson motioned to a seat nearby. "I am glad to have this opportunity of speaking to you. There's something I want to say—— We've all heard of your grandfather. It's a very pretty romance to us, but I can imagine how much it means to you. You do not remember your mother, I suppose?"

"Not at all."

"It was of her I wished to speak. She was in our home once—an hour or so. It was during my husband's lifetime and I like to think of his kindness to her. She had come in on the hack from Georgia. Someone had told her that Mr. Thompson might send her on to her sister's and she came to see him about it—— It was only a few months before your birth, my dear."

There were tears in the kind eyes as she went on: "She was so young and quite pretty, and—— we were exceedingly sorry for her. I wanted to take her in my arms and mother her; but there's nothing you can say to comfort a stranger——. I made her stay and rest awhile. She wouldn't agree to spend the night with us, but we had her take a cup of coffee and a bite to eat. Mr. Thompson sent her on and wouldn't accept pay for it. He had known your mother's father—— and he was anxious, anyway, to befriend her. We inquired many times about her and heard of her death and that you were in the home of a good man. Dear, I *felt* that she was a good woman and I just wanted to tell you so—after all these years." She laid her hand on Linda's lap: "I

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have made you cry when I only meant to make you happier by telling you how your sweet mother impressed two strangers. Don't cry any more now or I shall not forgive myself for spoiling your day."

In a few moments others came up and the conversation became general, but the great heart of the old lady had accomplished its mission—had quickened to new life the higher feelings of the girl, and given her a tender sense of nearness to the personality of her mother.

At a late hour the crowd again assembled in the grove to attend to the business part of the meeting. The exercises were opened with prayer by one of the ministers present, then came readings and talks bearing on the lives of several members of the family who had died during the past year. Throughout this part of the exercises Linda felt that Mr. Ledroux had lost the bright mood which had possessed him much of the day. The cynic was once more in the ascendant and the girl was unhappy.

For a time after the more serious part of the exercises were over there were short speeches from different ones, a bit of wit here, a flashing repartee there, and the spirit of fun ran riot without any coarseness, any unseemly thrusting, one at another. Ledroux looked on with interest. Turning to Linda, he said: "This is better than any after-dinner speaking I have ever heard."

"You notice the two men who are sparring so constantly at each other? They are brothers and part Irish," remarked Harry who was standing in the group of which Ledroux formed a part.

"An explanation of their wit, you think? A bright family anyway, it seems."

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Finally there was a speech from Mr. Selden, the minister of the family, then a call for his wife.

When she came forward a hush fell upon the crowd. A woman of striking presence, dignified, cultured, refined, she impressed all about her with her charm as well as her power.

In words that fell like music on the ear, she talked to them of their family, the meaning of these reunions, how they should become an incentive to high endeavor. Those who heard forgot the passing moments and listened eagerly for further words as they flowed on, beautiful, thoughtful, thought-provoking. And through it all rang a clear call to the Christ-life, a call sweet, persuasive, insistent. When she closed there was silence for a little space, then one of the old men spoke softly, asking the minister to pronounce a benediction. The crowd broke up quietly, some with tears dimming their eyes as they bade each other good-by, others leaving a friendly jest in the hearer's memory.

Mrs. Selden's talk stirred Linda profoundly, but a single look at Ledroux's face sent a chill to her heart. "Will it always be so?— Am I to hide the best, the sweetest feelings from him in the fear that he will think them silly or childish?"

The free spirit within her rebelled and later, when Fannie and Miss Wells spoke of Mrs. Selden's talk as being the one preëminent thing of the day, Linda joined in with emphatic praise of it, in spite of the fact that Ledroux was listening with that half smile which she had learned to associate with his most caustic moods.

CHAPTER XIX.

PERCHANCE TO DREAM.

The change to the invigorating air of the mountains, the sweet restful days there, association with the woman he loved, had braced Ledroux, and, apparently, had given him new life and strength. Linda's first letters from him bore signs of renewed hopefulness, but soon the light faded again. The girl knew he was unhappy. She feared he was ill beyond what he acknowledged. She wrote him anxiously, insistently—then waited.

The man dragged at his work, the heart gone out of it for him. He lost again the power to sleep, again resorted to the drug that numbed his faculties and gave him semblance of sleep. Then driven by his physical and mental distress he went to a specialist in the city.

* * *

Was the sun still shining? Or was that dusky light the fault of eyes that sometimes, of late, had played him false? Men and women on the street seemed to move in a soft haze. Vague shapes they were, now indistinct and wavering, now looming portentous before him—people of a giant breed who belonged not to his race or time.

He could not bear to go home, that home whose beauty and hallowed memories he had violated by an unholy life. Half blindly he struck out for one of the parks. He longed for silence and the breath of

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the woodland. He would feel freer, that awful gripping at his heart might let up. What was it the man had said, anyway? Incurable? But sometimes they made mistakes—these big men who looked their patients over and asked a few questions, then sent them out to face their fate. Their fate? God in heaven—if there be a God! what a mockery is life!—a few years of youth, energy, abounding vitality, then the battle, long or short, to renew the wasted forces, to keep going the fire that threatens to fade out at every adverse breath of air.

He reached the park and found it almost deserted. It must be too early for people to be out for pleasure. He looked at his watch. Was it only an hour ago that he had gone into that man's office? It seemed an age. He remembered dimly how he had looked with approval on the fittings of the room into which he was shown—the beauty of it, easy chairs and couches, softly tinted walls with rare pictures, choice books, all the things that suggest the refined use of money. The man must be a connoisseur as well as a famous physician, he had thought. At a later hour he had passed through the same room from the doctor's private office and mentally cursed the elegance that mocked him in his misery—elegance that hinted at the best things of life and reminded him what one would lose when he went forth on that great final quest. He might live this way for a few months—six, perhaps—the end might come at any time.

"I am sorry to tell you this," the doctor had said at the last; "but it is not my custom to evade." "Curse him! he might have spared me a little," thought the tortured man, then swore at himself for a fool since he had been drawn to the physician by his reputation for absolute truthfulness.

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He went toward the most secluded part of the park. How the woodland brought back the thought of Linda—the look of her as she came toward him from the background of greenness! Linda? Linda? What about her? How long was it before they were to be married? Everything had grown confused and indistinct in his brain. Was it still summer time? The trees, the grass, the flowers bore no mark of winter's coming. Everything was aflush with life. Only he carried about him the sign of merciless decay. In the autumn they were to marry. He had plead for the event to be earlier, but she would not agree. It was all coming back to him. Out of his intellectual numbness, this torpor of thought and feeling Linda stood forth, a distinct figure. Beautiful, aye—as a Greek goddess, but full of womanish notions about right and wrong. Cast in a narrow mold! Would she be willing to marry him if she knew everything? Did she love him well enough? His death-warrant would not stop her. Duty would send her, if need be, to the very foot of a gallows—but would she go on, knowing his past—that past which had haunted him with hellish persistence of late?

He had meant to tell her some day, after they had been married,—perhaps years after. He didn't know how other men managed those things. Of course he had not been worse than most men, but he imagined few of them had the courage to be honest with their wives. But about Linda there was something—the look of those clear eyes, perhaps, that made one feel like telling all the truth. And now—— ah! life was a blur to him. If that man was right and only a short time was left to him, ought he to think of allowing her to join her life to his broken one? Ought he to let her go through the misery of marrying a dying

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man just to brighten his last hours? If they were married would not his unhappiness be added to because of the haunting dread of her feeling when she found out the truth of his past? . . . Ought! ought! The word had given him little concern. His creed had not included its sterner meanings. His view of life had been the sybarite's. What right had a Creator to put a man into a world of pleasures with capacity for enjoyment and then bring punishment upon him for grasping what was held out to him?

He would go, yes—that's it. He would consult an old physician who had retired from practice long ago because of his age. Years before he had been the family physician for the Ledrouxs. His mother had commanded his services at the last. Great friends they had been. For her sake the old man might give him time and careful attention. Men still said he had wonderful skill, and occasionally one of the physicians of the city would carry a complicated case to him for consideration and advice. . . . Back into the heart of the city again, slow of foot, but unwilling to rest the tired body. He must go home for a moment then out again to see the doctor. A short time in his own house, a few directions to a servant, the tramp through the crowded streets, then the man of fate with his verdict. Not a word of the specialist at first, but point by point, slowly, painstakingly, the older physician went over the ground, sounded, tested, queried,—tried the mettle of each separate organ, then went back and tried again till the evening hours waned and men on the streets were seeking their homes.

Then the two men looked into each other's eyes—long and searchingly.

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"Your mother was a brave woman and a Christian."

"I understand. How long a time?"

"Not more than six months, I think,—a year at the outside."

"About what Earlham told me."

"Earlham? Then you needn't have come to me. He makes no mistakes of that sort. If your heart had been the only trouble he might have put you off, but when he tells you a thing, depend on its truth."

"And there is nothing—absolutely nothing? I was to be married in the fall."

"Ah! I didn't know. There is nothing to be done—so far as my knowledge goes. And Earlham is up with the very latest in his line."

"Yes," the man's brain was mercifully benumbed. He seemed to himself to be discussing the fate of another.

"I have heard of you during these later years, Ledroux. For your mother's sake I would have been glad to be your friend, but you seemed to avoid me—remember? Let us pass over that point of your life . . . In these later years I have been hearing that you were making a great success at the bar—a natural thing for a Ledroux—but, now and then, a rumor has reached me that . . . hurt—hurt. . . . This is no time to bring up the past against you, Telfair. Is it?" The old man bent forward and put his fingers lightly on Ledroux's wrist, as if to count his pulse.

"How old are you? I was your mother's physician at your birth, but the long years confuse my memory."

"I will soon be thirty-eight."

"A young man yet. I am old enough to be your grandfather, and there are some things I'd like to say to you, if I may?"

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Ledroux bowed his head and murmured assent.

"In our student days we men of the scalpel see so much of the purely physical side of life, I think we all pass through a period of doubt when we are slipping loose from our old moorings and out into a wide sea—a troubled sea. If we hold ourselves in hand during this time, we usually get back—perhaps not back into the old beliefs exactly, but back into a sense of the spiritual in life. And any right-thinking man in our profession will tell you that, just as surely as I've been counting your pulse, so surely we find the spiritual heart-beats of men and women. It's there always, the soul of man, throbbing, throbbing—sometimes beating itself out in its struggle after God.

"There's no denying it. There's no evading it. The one tremendous fact in life is God Almighty.

"We can no more get away from Him than we can rid ourselves of the body's thralldom here on earth.

"I have stood by many a dying man and woman. Some have gone out with no word; but give me the sight of one who faces the great change with a settled faith—such faith as your mother had, Telfair."

Ledroux looked at him in wordless agony.

The doctor went on: "I have wished often that I could draw you to me in some way, but old age is not attractive to young men and my life is so shut in there was slight chance of our meeting unless you had sought me out. Let me be your friend now. Come to me sometimes, will you not? An old man who has watched the shadows lengthen these years might help you."

"Thank you."

The doctor waited for further answer, then went on: "They told me that you had discarded what I would call your mother's religion, that you claim the

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only reasonable attitude toward these disputed things is that of the agnostic. Would you mind talking to me? I, too, passed through my age of doubt. There was a time when it seemed to me I must lose my grip on God because miracles were unthinkable, the resurrection of the body past belief—everything at chaos in my mind.

“There's more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half your creeds!’ If you have fought honestly for your faith the time will come when you will find peace.” Again there was silence. “Do I talk platitudes? There are still many things about which I do not think as in my early youth. I concede that we have gone to extremes in trying to hold to the letter of the Bible, but . . . ah, I am talking like one of the foolish. Am skimming the surface at a time when I would go down into the very deeps and plumb the still waters. Telfair, there's truth in the heart of God's universe, and truth in the soul of man to respond to the Larger Truth.” The doctor sank back in his chair.

Ledroux got up as with an effort and began walking slowly up and down the room, talking in a low voice: “I was a mere boy when I found it impossible to believe—as my mother did and as most church people of my acquaintance seemed to believe. If there is an Almighty God—thus I reasoned—if He is the one Creator, then He is the origin of sin and allows the suffering of the world. . . . The old Calvinist's God seemed to me an awful monstrosity, the unlovable creation of unloving minds. As I grew older and the world of books opened out before me I read eagerly many things that drove me further from the old beliefs. I was young and, perhaps, there was a touch of pride in my dealings with these questions. Looking

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back I can see that much of my reading must have been done in the search for something to bolster up my own convictions.

"Every act of a man's life, if not obedient to the hide-bound laws of your modern Pharisaism brings upon the sinner condemnation that embitters him. I did not care to worship so stern a Master nor to fellowship with such rigid Puritans. Thus it happened that after my mother's death the very fact that she had been a religious woman drove me the other way. I could see that people looked askance at me for not following in her footsteps and the unreasonableness of it all sent me adrift.

"As I grew older and saw deeper into life many things stirred me to a feeling of contempt for the smug-conventionally religious, those who are in the church for the respectability they get out of it. Long ago I made up my mind that money and good social position would hide one's sins in the eyes of ambitious mothers if they found the sinner looking with favor on their marriageable daughters. . . . But at last I met a girl of rare beauty—a fair, untarnished soul, absolutely without the ambitions that I had watched with scorn in other women. She was poor and belonged to obscurity, but as she found me drawn toward her she receded. . . . After all my heart was hers, the very best that's in me roused to meet the good that reigns throughout her being, I found that she, too, cared—in some degree, not with the abandon that some women might have in loving—but she agreed to marry me. . . . There have been times that I could almost believe in your God, in her God, since she gave me her promise. . . . Now," Ledroux stopped in front of the older man, "how do you suppose I feel? Just when there's a chance of real life for me—with love

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and trust and purity joined to my broken life, bracing me for better things, leading me to a knowledge of the highest,—just when this happens, the old malevolence gets in its work. If I marry her it is only to bring misery upon her, to add constantly to my own unhappiness. What is there left for me?"

"Always there's the hope of a larger life, Telfair."

"Conditioned on what? That I believe things which my mind cannot grasp? I cannot go over the old ground again. I am too tired to thresh out the old straw. It has yielded chaff always, why should I look for grain now?"

"It's a thing difficult to argue about, my boy, but you must see it—this great truth that we are intended for something more than a short existence here, trammelled by the body and its imperious demands."

"Then if I accept a belief in a Creator who is all-wise, all-loving, I shall claim that no child of his creation is 'lost,' to use your phrase. It would be malevolence indeed that would condemn a man to endless suffering for the quality of his brain. Oh! it's all dark to me," and Ledroux passed his hand across his forehead. "The sadness of life outweighs its pleasure—always. Surely the Father you tell me of would do somewhat in another life to make up for the sorrow of this. I cannot believe as you do, as Linda does. If I accept the idea of God, of Heaven, then I will hold to the faith that every child of His, faulty, frail, however he may be, will somewhere find peace and pardon. Now I must go. You look tired. I beg your pardon for having kept you so long. Good night," and he held out his hand.

"Good night, and—— God bless you. Come to me soon."

The old man walked to the door and watched Le-

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droux go out into the night, then turned and going back sat long in his loneliness, his heart aching for the sorrows of the world.

* * *

The house was quiet when Ledroux let himself in. He had given orders that no one should stay up for him. He went directly to his bedroom and sat down at a desk that he sometimes used. It had been his mother's, and for a number of years after her death he did not allow it in his room, but since his engagement he had moved it in himself and invariably used it when writing to Linda.

He wrote rapidly for a few minutes on legal cap, folded the paper and pigeonholed it, then drew a sheet of note paper toward him and began writing slowly. A few lines and he tried another sheet as if dissatisfied, another and still another. Finally he laid his pen down, got up and paced the floor with firm steps, and again seating himself wrote a few lines, then folded the paper, enclosed it in an envelope, sealed and addressed it. Going quietly out of the house he dropped the letter in the nearest box and again sought his room. After undressing he went to a little cupboard set deep in the wall, took out a small bottle and poured a draught. His hand shook as he held the glass up. "How easy to end it all," he thought. "If one but dared.

"The ages have honored Socrates for his fortitude when drinking the hemlock—why execrate the man of to-day who rids himself of a graceless gift?"

He walked to the table on which lay a few books, picked up his mother's Bible and slowly turned the leaves, catching the words here and there: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." "What a man he was—Paul!

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A fighter to the core, and such a brain! A few more like him and the world would be taken for Christ.

"What if it's all true—this mystical story that has influenced the world so wonderfully? The immaculate conception, the resurrection of the body, and the rest?"

He shivered slightly and turned again to the Book: "There is thenceforth laid up for me a crown of righteousness . . . and not to me only but unto all them also that love his appearing.' 'Love His appearing',—Ah!" and he closed the Book, turned away and went toward the bed, a weakness possessing him, the sense of weight overpowering him. "Let me sleep—sleep," he murmured brokenly, as he threw himself across the bed.

CHAPTER XX.

"AS IN A DREAM WHEN ONE AWAKETH."

Before Fannie's visit was ended there came a letter from Mrs. De Jarnette urging Linda to come to her at Eagle's Nest, for a few days at any rate.

"The very thing," declared Fannie. "I will go with you and stop a bit in the Nest. My time will soon be up. I'm sure the Pater is suffering for the sight of me, but I'll stay two days anyway. Do about, beloved, and freshen up your wardrobe and let's get ready. I don't want to leave this blessed spot, but when would I wish to do so? Everybody has been so good to me, and I weep at the thought of going away. 'All the night make I my bed to swim.' But never you mind, Elizabeth Wells, I am going to have you in my home yet as a star guest, and Aunt Sarah, the girls, Jack and all—oh! I shall never give them up, bless 'em!"

The whole family showed their regret at losing Fannie. Without any parade of words they made her feel that she had won a sure place in their hearts. The day before her departure the younger members of the Williams family came over and spent the night, while Harry took tea and stayed till a late hour the same evening.

That night, long after Elise was asleep, Fannie stood in front of the mirror and mentally took herself to task: "Fannie Montague Everett, I have long

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thought you are feeble of mind, and now I *know* it. Consider yourself! a would-be philosopher, taking the good things offered you and proposing to do no whining after the unattainable. Some spirit you have, what might well be called a fair share of real *grit*. Do you recall the fact that you extracted your own teeth in your childhood, even going so far as to tie one tooth to a doorknob, then giving a wild leap? Remember? It gave you the shivers to go through the preparation, but you were plucky enough to keep on. And *now!*—*Now!*—Do you hear? *I say Now!* See how you are behaving! Of course you told him she does not love that Ledroux man. Deep down in your heart you've been knowing for some time that you would tell him, but what a coward you were in doing it! Putting it off just as long as ever you could, then half-way praying that it wouldn't rouse the old love in his heart. It ought to make you sick to think of it! You see that survigorous fist?" A small hand was firmly doubled up and held out for inspection. "You are a child, a rampageous child. If you were only a boy child, this is what you'd need—well laid on by another boy.

"As it is, you must be taught some sense, somehow. If he still loves her you don't want what's left. Think of it! You trying to fill a heart that Linda had once fitted into. Besides, you have no earthly reason for believing he could ever care for you, chit that you are.

"Why should you keep thinking of him? Of his manliness, his goodness, the power that's in him? You simply know that Linda does *not* love Telfair Ledroux, and you believe that she will find it out in time and her heart will naturally turn to the man who *is* a man. What then? Ought you not to be happy

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over the thought that the two people whom you hold so dear might at last find happiness?

"And what of you, Fannie Everett? Goosey-goose! Fancying yourself in oh no, no. You honor him but you have too strong a will to allow any—foolishness on your part. Crowd it out, that weakness. Stamp on it. Leave no sign behind.

"Didn't you try to make Harry see the lighter side of these things last winter when he was in deep waters?

"You foolishly quoted: 'Men have died and worms have eaten them, but not for love,' then begged his pardon for your own folly.

"Now fit that to yourself—pretended wiseacre, and end this tomfoolery." Whereupon she went to bed and quietly cried herself to sleep.

The next day there were no traces of the night's struggle in the girl's face or manner. As usual she was the life of the party. She refused to allow a sad word from anybody. Her good-by was bright, with the promise that she would return next summer.

The girls found Mrs. De Jarnette without her companion.

"I gave her leave to visit her family and friends while I am away. Indeed I am very well and do not need her in the least—just now. The truth of the matter is, Linda, I wanted you awhile all to myself.

"You have spoiled me entirely. After having you in my home, almost any other girl would seem commonplace."

After Fannie had gone away Linda gave herself up to Mrs. De Jarnette, reading to her, talking with her, showing her the countless little attentions that youth should pay to mature age.

During these days the two were drawn closer to-

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gether than ever before. Always a lovable woman Mrs. De Jarnette seemed to Linda to have added a finer grace to her character. The conventions of the world had limited her range of thought as well as controlled her actions. Somehow she was outgrowing these limitations. It was as if the spirit found itself struggling, chrysalis-like, to get into a freer world, one of purer air and wider sweep of vision. Her manner toward the young girl was tenderer, more motherly than its wont. Linda felt the difference and her heart went out in gratitude to her.

One evening when the two were alone in Mrs. De Jarnette's room and all their part of the house quiet, the older lady asked Linda to put down her book.

"There is something I must say to you, Linda. It isn't worth while to postpone it longer."

The girl read distress in every look and tone. "What is it, Mrs. De Jarnette? You need not hesitate to talk freely to me. Please go on."

"I have a confession, an apology to make, and it's hard to put it into words." There was a long pause. Linda left her seat under the light, and, drawing a chair near Mrs. De Jarnette, she sat down and gently stroked her hair, murmuring softly to her as one might to a frightened child.

"Oh! it's this—all your goodness to me, your cheerful service, your sweetness, that forces me to tell you If I hurt you, forgive me. It may be better to have the heartache now instead of suffering for long years." Then, with such a look as one might have who had made up his mind to plunge into deep waters with no hope of salvation, she went on: "When Telfair began to show such marked preference for you, here last summer, I was disturbed, troubled. At first it seemed to me unreasonable that he intended

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more than simply to amuse himself for the time. Yet that was not like him. With all his faults he has shown no tendency to flirt. Still I supposed that he would be too ambitious, or worldly, to marry a woman who did not have money or high social position. Anyway I was on guard. He should not trifle with you—with a young girl who was under my care. That is the way the matter stood in my mind for awhile. Even after he sought you out so pointedly in Savannah I believed he did not mean to make a misalliance. But as I lived longer with you and found you to be gold, my dear girl, I began to be ashamed that I was allowing an intimacy that might be your ruin, might bring you nothing but unhappiness. I watched you closely last fall, Linda, and at no time could I say that you showed love for Telfair. So I temporized, letting things drift, believing that you have so much strength of character you were able to take care of yourself. Then when you came back after Christmas and told me that you were engaged I knew that I had done wrong, that you should not have been allowed to go so far without knowing—the whole truth."

Linda sat motionless, her face white, her eyes, wide and bright, looking into Mrs. De Jarnette's.

"Shall I go on? It's hard to tell an innocent girl these things."

"Go on."

"Telfair Ledroux has been what the French call a *roué*. Perhaps that is not the word, for he was more restrained than some men, but he seemed absolutely open,—shameless, his enemies might say. There was one woman for a long time. . . . She died and he took her child into his home. That caused a break with his sister and many of his old friends. . . .

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It was a dreadful time. He never talked to me about it, but his sister did. She blamed him for having the boy in the old home, bringing shame upon the memory of her mother, and he talked of the hypocritical conventions by which *her* social world was ruled, of how little consequence wrongdoing was if it was decently hidden. He kept the child in his home for three or four years, then sent him away to school. The boy was never in Savannah again, I think. Knowing Telfair as I do, I felt sure that it was done for the child's sake. The boy had grown old enough to understand something of the situation, and, perhaps, was sensitive about it. Gradually people talked less, and for the past few years the man has had all the attention one could ask. There are few mothers in Savannah who would hesitate if Telfair Ledroux wished to marry one of their daughters. But I have felt that you are different. And I did not believe that he has led a pure life, even of late. Oh, of course he has done so since your engagement. And if you can forgive him . . . and trust him, you may be happy together yet."

Mrs. De Jarnette looked at Linda. The still, white face was inscrutable. There was a painful pause.

"Forgive me, Linda, if I have hurt you. I have only meant to do right by you, child."

"I know, I know. Let me go to my room now." The girl bent over and kissed her friend tenderly.

The next morning before Mrs. De Jarnette was out of her room Linda came in with her usual look and manner. The older lady was deeply anxious, yet hesitated to question the girl in any way. She would wait and let Linda confide in her. Advice was super-

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fluous. Openly expressed sympathy might be unwelcome.

After the usual casual talk there was constraint. Mrs. De Jarnette felt it and hastened to make talk, keeping away from the one great subject. She wished Linda would be a bit more impulsive, more like other girls. She might tell her plans at any rate. Most girls would have been in tears or hysterics—but here—Oh! dear, dear!—such quiet, such absolute mastery of one's emotions. Was Linda cold, feelingless after all? Or did. . . ? The undercurrent that was surging beneath the flow of small talk came to a sudden stop. Linda was saying—only saying that someone was knocking, "Shall I go to the door?"

"Thank you, yes. A 'phone message for me? Tell them I'll be down there immediately, Linda. A message from Waynesville? I can't imagine from whom. Will you go down with me, dear, or do you prefer waiting here? It is almost breakfast time, anyway, isn't it? You will wait till the bell rings? Very well; I'll hurry on to answer that call."

After Mrs. De Jarnette had gone Linda threw open a window and stood by it looking down upon the valley. The fog had not yet scattered and the mountains seemed to be lifting their heads from opalescent seas. Off to the right Platt's Balsam stood with the mists bathing his side while the first victorious rays of the sun crowned his crest.

Nature's appeal was never in vain for the girl. The loneliness of the hills, the calm beauty of them, had gone into her soul and become a part of it. No alien looking upon the scene could realize the mighty love, the deep yearning, that filled the heart of the girl. Through long hours of the night she had wrestled with

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herself and had sent her spirit out on its earnest quest for God, if so He might be found, might speak to her in those high words that point the path of Duty.

She had turned in sickening loathing from Ledroux's past. Surely it was impossible for her to face a future in which, day after day, every hour, every moment, the ghost of that past should stand beside her. This morning as she looked out on these beloved hills the restless soul became calm. The fret of everyday life seemed a slight thing in the face of these sentinels of God, keeping watch on the peoples below, and bearing witness to the Infinite and Eternal Presence.

She was scarcely conscious of the passing time and failed to notice the fact that the guests were going down to breakfast. At last the door opened and Mrs. De Jarnette walked slowly across the room. Linda turned.

"What is it? O! Mrs. De Jarnette, what is it?" The girl was frightened out of her usual composure. She threw her arms around her friend and drew her to a chair, then knelt beside her, murmuring soft words of love, kissing the trembling hands, stroking cheek and hair—in tenderest ways, showing sympathy.

"Can't you tell me now, dear Mrs. De Jarnette? Let me help you bear it—whatever it is, my dear, dear friend."

"I can't tell you—I can't, I can't," the stricken look on the face, the appealing agony of the eyes touched Linda more than words.

"Yes, you can, dear heart. Remember how I love you. Anything that troubles you—oh! it will help you to share your trouble with me."

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"Telfair Ledroux is . . . he—died—last—night. They found him this morning—dead."

The message had been telegraphed to Waynesville and from there 'phoned up to Eagle's Nest. The servants in the Ledroux home had spoken of Mrs. De Jarnette as being the most intimate friend of the unfortunate man. Hers was the only house in which he made himself at home. A telegram had been sent to his sister notifying her of his death. Both messages simply stated the facts without details.

Mrs. De Jarnette did not oppose Linda when the latter quietly announced her intention of accompanying her friend to Savannah. There need be no publicity about the matter. The young girl would be known as a former companion who was showing friendship for the older lady in a trying hour.

Through the long day Linda was full of thought for Mrs. De Jarnette—not once forgetful of any little comfort, apparently setting herself aside in her effort to care for the frail woman who was inwardly blaming herself for the revelations that must add to the girl's unhappiness.

It was well into the night when they neared Savannah. At one of the stations not far from the city a gentleman came in and apparently recognizing an acquaintance not far from Linda, seated himself and began a conversation.

After a while the girl's attention was attracted by the name which was uppermost in her thought.

"You haven't seen the account? An afternoon paper suggests suicide. The morning papers announcing his death drew out the fact that the last person who saw him alive is a retired physician—an old friend of the family—to whom Ledroux had gone for advice

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after having an examination by Dr. Earlham. Both men gave him only a few months to live. It seems there was a complication of diseases, and the reporter's theory is that he chose death—instantaneous—to the torture of a slow one. There was a glass showing that he had taken medicine. A fresh bottle of some sleep-inducing drug was found partially emptied."

"I believe Ledroux would have no scruples about suicide. You know he had his own views of right and wrong—and they were not such as to teach him reverence for life. He counted God out altogether."

"Yes, I know. What becomes of his property?"

"That's another proof, the reporter claims, of suicidal intent—the fact that he had written a will leaving a certain boy—you understand—well provided for; the home and belongings go to his sister, while the rest of his estate is left to the support of an institution for homeless children."

Linda listened with a half-conscious feeling that she ought not to hear these things, yet hardly knowing how to avoid it.

She sat perfectly calm. Throughout the day she had so often felt as if the real Linda were back in the quiet of her mountain home, treading its peaceful ways, while the girl who was going through these spectacular scenes was only the shadow of herself—a creature of fantasy.

"Linda," Mrs. De Jarnette called softly. The girl bent over the seat in front of her. "What is it? Are you comfortable? Can I do anything for you?" She adjusted the pillow and stood looking down on the troubled face.

"Bend low, my dear. Did you hear? I caught the last words. Did they speak of Telfair?"

"Yes."

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"But they never mentioned your name?"

"No."

"That, at least, is a thing to be thankful for—that you were not dragged into publicity."

Linda made no answer. She waited for a moment for further speech from Mrs. De Jarnette, then sat down with the same outward calm. Inwardly she wondered dully why one should think of the world's puny laws in the face of the fact that a Soul had gone forth, naked, to face its Maker.

It was worth something to Ledroux's few friends to have the drug clerk come forward and discredit the theory of suicide. The medicine was a mixture usually having chloral in it, but the clerk had noticed how frequently the prescription was being filled, and had purposely decreased the dangerous element in the last bottles.

They took his body from the old home to its last resting place beside his mother's grave. A few friends followed the bier and quietly laid him away.

Soon afterward his last letter was forwarded to Linda from her mountain home. She began reading it in the numb, feelingless way that characterized every act during those days.

There were only a few lines, but every word was freighted with meaning. He told her of the doctor's verdict and offered her freedom. He would not sadden her youth with the care of a dying man. The end might come at any moment, they had said. . . . There was money he would have been glad to leave for her to use in noble ways, but she would prefer it otherwise, and to spare her from the world's curious eye he had put much of his money where it might do the good she would have him do. "You are young.

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Time will heal your wounds, but you will not forget me? Still, I want you to be happy.

"Good night, good night."

Before she had finished reading the letter tears had come to relieve Linda's overburdened heart. Ah! if only she could grieve for him as for one whom she had loved with supreme affection.

CHAPTER XXI.

CONCLUDING.

The months passed, bringing mental and spiritual health to Linda. She had stayed a few weeks with Mrs. De Jarnette, then had gone back to her grandfather and taken up the life of loving service for the two lonely men. As she learned to lose herself in work for them she began to look back and see that she had been essentially selfish. While outwardly living for others she had chafed and brooded. The daily round had not been one glad outflowing of love which would show itself in simplest ways as in the greatest.

She was outgrowing the intense egotism of youth which turns the eye inward with morbid watchfulness.

During this time the quiet sympathy of her friends was very precious to her. Miss Wells and Mrs. De Jarnette wrote often. Fannie was never too busy to send long, bright letters full of her old, sweet "foolery," as she termed it. Her first letter enclosed an affectionate note from her mother reminding Linda that the family claimed a visit from her at the very first opportunity, and assuring her that all of them held her in dearest love, and that any sorrow of hers was inevitably theirs.

Later came a short letter from Dr. Montague.

Fannie, he wrote, had kept him informed as to her friend. A matter of such vital interest as Mr. Ledroux's death could not fail to touch her old friends and enlist their sympathy.

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Harry wrote from the University, straightforward, manly letters, full of consideration for her and always giving news of his school life. By crowding during the first two years he would finish college in another year. In the Junior class at present, and making up certain studies, he was healthfully busy. That eager thirst for knowledge, which is natural to the undeveloped mind, was spurring him on and leaving him no time to brood over the past. From that past rose the thought of Linda as something, not to sadden a man but to hearten him for the battle of life. "She has given me my manhood. I shall not forget that; God bless her."

His letters, breathing this spirit, became a source of pleasure to Linda. There was no surer proof that the girl had never loved him than this fact,—she was happier when his letters gave no sign that the old feeling was still alive in his heart.

In the early fall she took up her music again, intending to cultivate her voice enough to use it in the home, where it might be a source of enjoyment—for her uncle, especially, who loved music with that absorption which the physically strong cannot understand.

Aided by her uncle she began a course in English literature and found a double pleasure therein because it proved to be an outlet for the invalid's pent-up forces. The two went back over the ways long ago traveled by the man, and the days were brightened for both as they lingered over the fields of the past, or paused for pleasant excursions into the present.

As time thus filled, passed fleetly away, Linda found herself turning from the shadows. Youth and sound health are wonderfully elastic, and the soul that has

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fixed its faith on God cannot always grope in darkness.

One day when she was reading a story of mountain life to her uncle she laid the magazine down and spoke freely of what was in her heart. She blamed herself for having been blind to the good that was in her people. She had chafed against the narrowness of her life before she left the mountains, and had, unconsciously, lost sight of the sterling qualities of her countrymen, their truth and honesty, their sturdy independence, their splendid reserve power. Now that she had seen something of the outer world she realized the good of her fellow mountaineers and wished that she might do something for them.

"Not simply for my aunt's family—we are doing all that's necessary for them—but for the whole community. Naked charity isn't at all what is needed. That sort of thing destroys our best qualities, the independence and self-reliance that belong to mountain people. One girl can't do much except for the individual, something like the work Miss Wells is doing; but I can't get it out of my mind. Perhaps grandfather would be interested and might help establish a little school."

"Have you thought of just what you do want? Not a straight-out mission school, I take it?"

"Not at all."

"Think about it, Linda, and let me know. I've done so little in the world, it would give me great pleasure to be the means of helping others to a better life. I have been giving money to different enterprises, but there has been nothing that I could feel was my very own. If I could know that money of mine had made a *man* of one neglected boy I could bear this inactivity better."

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Linda was looking at him with happy shining eyes. "Oh! Uncle, do you really mean it? We *can* do something. See if we don't!"

She immediately began a correspondence with Miss Wells and different ones who might be of help to her in formulating a plan. Her grandfather encouraged her by the promise of assistance when needed, but suggested that the beginning should be altogether with his son's money. She wrote to Valle Crucis, North Carolina, in regard to their methods, consulted an architect and soon had her mind clear as to what she would undertake. She wrote to Mr. Gentry offering a good price for several acres of his farm, and also authorized him to buy, for her, one-half of Coon Bletcher's land at a price which, to the two men, seemed wildly extravagant. In answer to Coon's protest against her paying such a sum for his "onery little place" Linda explained her intentions. On the acres bought from her uncle she proposed erecting two cottages and having them ready for use by summer. She knew that Coon's little farm was noted for its apple orchard. She wished to buy the half of this orchard for experimental purposes, hoping that the young man would become interested and would follow the methods she expected to introduce, thus increasing the value of his own property, and, at the same time, aiding her in the work she was planning. She hoped to have a man on the ground by spring to begin the school in a small way, and she would be glad to have the coöperation of her Uncle Bart and other farmers in the neighborhood.

"You are hitting the nail squarely on the head," wrote Fannie. "You have found a prescription that beats my old doctor by a long shot. I bet that you do something worth doing. Where are you to get a

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man for the place? If you need any female help, call on me. I have all the executive ability needed to manage a scholastic establishment, and my education, you know, is classical. I may not have the go-to-the-stake spirit that prompts some women to come to western Carolina in search of missionary work, but I do have a profound faith in the human beings who people our mountains, and I would be glad to give a hand to help them uplift themselves. Really, we want to do something to further your project. The Pater is sympathetic, and my uncle—bless him!—bids me say that you may call on him if you run short of money.

"I think your plan of having a summer school is admirable. A music teacher, art and nature-study teacher already engaged! Fine! Imagine what it will mean to so many of those boys and girls to be taught to sing and to know the secret of the woods. And imagine how proud we will be if Jack, for instance, should discover the qualities of a great artist.

"If you need me I will be there ready for you (thank you for renewing the invitation to visit you at Aunt Sarah's next summer). And I am sure you ought to profit by my genius for cooking. My steaks are pronounced perfect and my pastries are dreams. Have you decided to introduce the fine art of cooking? You are to have farming, fruit-growing, hand-craft? Right you are! Those lovely old-time rag carpets, those exquisite coverlets!—may the art of making them never be lost 'Till all the seas run dry,' my dear, 'Till all the seas run dry.'"

In the midst of Linda's planning the Christmas holidays came on. Fannie, who was now in her senior year at school, wrote urging her friend to spend the time with her in her own home, but Linda had grown considerate of others. The two men who

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depended on her for much of their pleasure should not be left alone at a season when they needed her most, but the week following Christmas found the two friends together in Brevard, and here, again, Linda was the center of loving attention. Fannie had never been more assuredly the true friend, tactful and affectionate, while the younger children were running over with happiness because the girls were with them again.

Dr. Montague, also, was visiting the home. Mrs. Everett alone knew the man's secret, and as she watched Linda, marking the sure ripening of her character, she bade her brother be patient till the fulness of her young maturity should bring the girl to wiser self-knowledge.

Then—why then, what woman could resist the compelling of a strong, persistent, masterful love? A love in keeping with the noble nature of such a man?

During her visit to Fannie Linda found herself turning to Dr. Montague for advice and suggestion in the work she was projecting. His visits to the Everett family had shown him much of mountain life and character. Armed with this knowledge he was able to give Linda practical help, such as she had not found elsewhere. Mr. Everett also took sympathetic interest in her plans, restraining here, suggesting there. From him she secured the address of a young man, a former student of an agricultural college, who was farming in Transylvania and bringing to his work the practical wisdom of such new methods as were suited to the mountains. Before Linda's visit was ended he came to Mr. Everett's to consult with her. She made him an offer that decided him to go immediately and take charge of the little experimental

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farm which Linda hoped to make an object lesson for the surrounding country.

After her return to Augusta the girl's time was filled with thought for her school. Soon she had the cottages under way, using Miss Wells' judgment with that of her teacher, in deciding the exact location for the buildings. She empowered the teacher to offer money to farmers in the community for the purpose of setting out and caring for orchards, the proceeds from which were to be divided between the owners of land and the school.

In the spring she made a short trip to the old home and was delighted to see the progress there. The mountaineers are intensely conservative, and some of them were looking askance at her experiments. Others were watching with interest, saying little, but preparing to profit by the success of her methods.

"Shucks!" remarked Coon Bletcher to one of the skeptical. "She's got sense and her grand-daddy's got money, an' I'm willin' to let her take my little ol' place an' make what she can get out of it. Hit ain't ever done me no good but to git me into trouble tryin' to save the fruit on it."

Regular literary work was not to be undertaken till the autumn. In the meantime, for the short summer school, teachers were secured for sums that would hardly exceed their living expenses. The art teacher, practically gave her services, as she was to bring a few pupils with her who wished to paint from nature.

Linda had undertaken this scheme through desire to help in the development of her people, but in it she was losing her old morbid self, was finding a new, stronger, more self-reliant individuality. In a large sense she was verifying the truth: "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

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Again the summer time has come. The mountains invite one with their beauty, their charm of flower and air and wood.

Linda and Fannie are together once more in the Gentry home. Here, too, is Miss Wells, happy in the new outlook for the people she has learned to love; happy, moreover, because she sees the ripening fineness of her favorite's character. Here are two of the teachers, the young man who gives the year to the work, and the lady who is teaching the young pupils some of the wonders of the nature-world. In one of the new cottages are domiciled the art and music teachers with the pupils who came with them for outdoor study and the change of air.

There are only a few pupils who are taking advantage of these opportunities, but Linda is patient, and believes the heaven will do its work more thoroughly if it be allowed to move slowly. She feels repaid, as the days go by, to find that Jack is developing an omnivorous appetite for knowledge the nature-teacher can offer him.

"If the boy keeps on I shall have to study all winter to keep ahead of him. It's wonderful. He is a born naturalist, while I am just like other women who take up such things—in it because it's a fad, perhaps, and because it helps me to make a living."

Linda looked at the teacher intently. "Three years ago I would have resented that statement. I was so long fighting what seemed to me a silent acknowledgment that women are inferior to men. Now I begin to see things differently."

"Not inferior, but different, Miss Linda. I think it's just as important a fact that Susan learns to make a beautiful loaf as it is that Jack has an overmastering

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desire to learn the habits of every worm or pollywog he finds."

"I see that Miss Andrews has fine notions about woman's sphere," interposed Fannie. "In this day of advanced ideas I am delighted to hear anything of the sort. During the few short weeks since my graduation my sylph-like form has almost faded into nothingness because I've been trying so hard to think of some mighty thing I shall undertake to render my name immortal. Now I am satisfied. Cooking is my strong point. I shall hie me forth to the kitchen and broil a steak to be converted into grey matter for you intellectuals, especially Jack."

* * *

Harry has resumed his old intimacy in the Gentry home. His open admiration of Linda and the friendly preference she shows him may, sometimes, lead others to believe the old footing will yet be resumed, but the two understand each other, and Linda is biding her time. A long while she has watched Fannie jealously, fearing that some other might win a place in that strong heart into which she is hoping that Harry will enter and rule. She speaks of this to no one, but she sees that Harry is turning to the true-hearted girl as naturally as the plant bends toward the sunlight, and Linda is quietly happy in the belief that these two friends are treading the old, but ever new, path toward a noble and self-sacrificing love—the path trod by all true lovers since men and women have looked into each other's eyes and seen the reflection of God's love there.

As for Linda herself, no thought has yet entered her mind that the man whom she has long honored is waiting for the time to come when he can dare to lay claim to her heart.

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Only the other day Fannie received a letter from her uncle saying that he purposes coming to the mountains of Macon County for a week's rest—perhaps longer. His plan is to go down through South Carolina and Georgia, then come up the Tallulah Falls road to Franklin. Would he be in the way if he chose to come out from that point to see her and watch the working of Linda's plans? Could he find entertainment near? And would Linda think it intrusion? "You are close to her. You know her as no one else, perhaps. Let me be honest with you—I am hungry for the sight of her. Long ago I schooled myself to think of her without hope, but now that she is in a position which does not forbid it, I find myself turning to the thought of her—constantly, eagerly, even hopefully. I am not a boy. This has gone deep, Fannie, and I shall not give up readily. I am willing to be patient, to wait—wait, but meanwhile my heart shall not break for the sight of her."

Fannie's face was white and still. All the lightness was gone from her now,—the seriousness, the religious reverence that lies deep in her nature had come to the surface. Was God's providence back of it all? Where could Linda so surely find peace as in the great calm of this steadfast nature? And Harry? Ah! Harry—.

END.



